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The International Response to Darfur

About FRIDE

FRIDE is an independent think-tank based in Madrid, focused on issues related to democracy and human rights; peace and security; and humanitarian action and development. FRIDE attempts to influence policy-making and inform public opinion, through its research in these areas.

Introduction

The armed conflict and humanitarian crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan has become a rallying cry for Western civil society, and is held to represent the worst series of ongoing human rights violations in the world today. Yet try as it might, the international community has not been able to stall the bloodshed, nor has the government in Khartoum shown great interest in pacifying the restive region.

On Wednesday April 9, FRIDE held a closed seminar on international organisations' response to the Darfur crisis. It is generally accepted that the outcome of the missions (UNAMID and EUFOR) in the region is highly unpredictable, and that the UN, the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU) are facing one of the largest humanitarian crises of the 21st century, testing the credibility and reputation of all three organisations.

The objective of this seminar was to offer a broad view of the challenges these organisations face in Darfur, and the way they have responded. A great deal of attention was given to the newly

appointed UN mission, UNAMID, its mandate, and the minimum requirements that are needed for it to be successful, because after many years of talks, negotiations and delays, the mission – which is seen by many as the best solution to this crisis – has finally been deployed, albeit far from entirely. Has it and will it live up to the hype? Is the mission really the solution? Is it an alibi for a lack of political involvement by the international community? These are some of the questions that most concerned seminar participants.

National, regional and international dimensions

The conflict in Darfur began in 2003 when two rebel groups, the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) took arms against the Sudanese government. What began as a small rebellion transformed into a conflict of massive proportions, involving other countries and organisations from the region and beyond. The roots of the violence are complex, stemming from a mixture of ethnic tensions, a struggle for scarce resources, and a general breakdown of traditional systems of governance in a country which has been on the verge of fragmentation since it gained independence in 1956.

Furthermore, as African expert Alex de Waal has put it, Darfur's war is even more complicated because it is the product of local conflicts worsened by misgovernment and neglect, the spillover of Chad's civil war, and the readiness of political factions in Khartoum to support armed rebels as a means to control the country's peripheries. The crisis has been going on for more than five years now, and it shows, at the moment, no signs of abating. The last official independent mortality survey for Darfur, based on data collected by a team from the World Health Organisation from 8,844 displaced people living in camps, was released in March 2005. It estimated that 10,000 people had died

among the refugees each month between the end of 2003 and October 2004, mostly of malnutrition and disease. The total number of deaths was thus estimated to be around 200,000. More than three years later, experts and NGOs have been stating that the death toll is now probably closer to 300,000, with more than 2.5 to 3 million Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs), whereas the government of Sudan claims that no more than 9,000 persons have been killed since the beginning of the conflict.

At the national level, many of the participants agreed that the situation on the ground is now more chaotic than ever. At the beginning of the conflict, two or three main rebel groups could be identified, and NGOs and humanitarian workers had to deal only with them to get around Darfur to help those in need. Now, as one humanitarian worker put it, "you cannot walk two miles before needing to seek permission from another rebel group or faction". One participant reported that there are currently 25 armed groups operating in the Darfur region.

This fragmentation enormously complicates matters because most of these "rebel groups" are engaged in theft, banditry and looting. Accordingly, the work of humanitarian workers and peacekeepers is hindered, and they cannot move freely around Darfur. Harassment is routine: since the beginning of the year, according to the UN, 60 World Food Program (WFP) contracted trucks have been hijacked. Furthermore, the WFP says that 39 trucks are still missing and 29 drivers still unaccounted for. Also, it should be noted that the government of Sudan and janjaweed militias have continued their destructive activities: they still account for a share of the attacks, although mostly on civilians, and they loot as much as any rebel group.

Thus, it appears that Darfur is in an increasingly intractable conflict with deep grievances on multiple sides, which are mostly led by extremists and spoilers. There are many shifting alliances, and the parties are always seeking a better deal, be it militarily or politically. At the moment, a new agreement is not in the interests of the parties, as the latest one, the Darfur

Peace Agreement (DPA) of 2006, has been widely criticised and is rejected by almost all Darfurians for its lack of inclusiveness and its effects on rebel fragmentation. Hence, the situation is more chaotic than ever, which greatly complicates the work of relief organisations and peacekeepers, while posing ever greater dangers to the population of Darfur.

Some argue that the crisis in Darfur is, above all, regional in scope. Indeed, the conflict has spread out on the Chad and Central African Republic (CAR) borders, and now involves many regional actors. Sudan and Chad are engaged a proxy war as militias are fighting on both sides of the border - Chadian rebel groups have rear bases in Darfur and launch attacks against the Chadian government, whereas a lot of Darfur rebel groups have the support of Chad and are being armed and sheltered on its territory, destabilising the whole region. Many participants agree that it is not in Chad's immediate interest to try to solve the Darfur crisis before solving its own war. Similarly, CAR's northeastern borders are also unstable as militia and insurgents use it as a passageway. Furthermore, Libya has recently (late 2007) been more involved in the resolution of the conflict, hosting peace talks in Sirte. This conflict also has implications for other troublesome regions in Africa, as porous borders and increased implication by foreign groups can foster international Islamic terrorism. It is also worth noting that the African Union (AU) has been, and in a certain measure still is, very implicated in the Darfur crisis, as it sent a peacekeeping mission in 2004 that was recently "re-hatted" as a UN mission, UNAMID.

Finally, it is also essential to understand the Darfur crisis at the international level: indeed, many of the participants agreed that the Darfur conflict must be seen as an international crisis and not just as a local conflict. Many campaigning efforts have been staged at the international level by a wide variety of civil society organisations and celebrities – particularly in North America, where outrage over the crisis has been intense. Although international involvement in Darfur has been significant, it has also been contradictory at times: according to De Waal, "there is little evidence

that these efforts have influenced the course of the war in a measurable way". This was also the impression of many seminar participants, who viewed international efforts as being poorly coordinated and lacking a holistic approach or a long-term plan.

International engagement

To begin with, the UN, in collaboration with other organisations, has four different missions deployed in the region. First of all, there is UNMIS (United Nations Mission in Sudan), monitoring the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which was signed in 2005 between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan's People Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M).

Secondly, UNAMID (United Nations Mission in Darfur) replaced the AU mission in Darfur, on December 31, 2007. After multiple rounds of negotiations between the UN Security Council and Sudan, it was finally agreed that a hybrid force (AU and UN personnel) would replace AMIS by the end of 2007. UN Resolution 1769 thus authorised the largest peacekeeping mission ever to be undertaken, as 26,000 troops would be deployed to Darfur. Unfortunately, as of February 2007, only 9,000 troops (military and police components) and about 1,250 civilian personnel were actually on the ground.

Thirdly, the UN also authorised a mission to monitor and control the growing instability and humanitarian situation at the borders of Eastern Chad and North-Eastern CAR. It consists of a multidimensional presence of two sides: a civilian dimension, MINURCAT (United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad), and a military dimension, EUFOR (European Union Force). This force was launched in January, but many seminar participants expressed doubts over whether the sole purpose of

EUFOR is to support the UN and the AU in Darfur, and in the region (as indicated by its mandate). Many see this mission as another French initiative to strengthen its influence in the region, and above all in Chad. However, other participants still stress that EUFOR appears to be a more humanitarian than political mission.

In addition to these different UN missions, other countries have been involved one way or another in the Darfur crisis. For example, China has received heavy criticism for supporting the Khartoum regime, exchanging arms for oil. The United States have also been very engaged in this crisis, calling it a genocide in 2004, lobbying for tougher UN resolutions, putting pressure on Sudan's government and rebel groups to sign the DPA in 2006, and imposing bilateral sanctions in 2007. Some participants, however, observed that Khartoum's cooperation with Washington's counter-terrorist strategy has blunted these efforts, and galvanised the Sudanese government's refusal to bow to international pressure.

All these efforts and countervailing influences, combined with the UN's presence in Darfur, accounts for an international presence that is poorly coordinated, and which, according to participants, is sometimes more harmful than helpful. Also, most of them agreed that there has been a consistent gap between international rhetoric and effective action on the ground.

Minimum requirements for peace and a successful mission

The UN has some benchmarks and minimum requirements for a mission to be successful and eventually achieve peace. There needs to be a **peace to keep**, a **political commitment from the parties to resolve the conflict** and a **unified Security Council**. Unfortunately, this UN theory does not hold well with Darfur. Indeed, there is actually no peace to keep. As noted earlier, there is an increased fragmentation of "rebel groups" and they are always looking to enhance their strategic position. The situation is more chaotic than ever, with theft and looting omnipresent, and the last peace agreement, the DPA, rejected by most of the rebel groups and Darfurian civilians. Second of all, there is no political commitment from either the government of Sudan or rebels to resolve the conflict. Khartoum seems not to be negotiating in good faith and the rebels are always seeking a better deal, be it militarily or politically. And finally, the UN Security Council is not united, even though many resolutions have been adopted concerning Darfur. China, Russia and the United States do not have the same agenda and this explains why a lot of these resolutions have been watered down.

Furthermore, one of the participants highlighted some other requirements that are necessary if a peacekeeping operation is to have more chance for success than failure: **parties must be sincere and willing to cooperate with the peacekeeping operation** (continuation of the conflict will not bring them any further), **there must be a sense of security for parties that do not trust each other** and **attention must be devoted to all the possible causes of conflict**. Again, in the case of Darfur, these requirements are not met. First of all, none of the parties are cooperating sincerely with the peacekeeping mission, least of all a

central government that has used a “divide and rule” strategy repeatedly in its dealings with the country’s periphery, from the Nuba Mountains in the 1980s to Southern Sudan and now Darfur. In the wake of rebel fragmentation, Darfur is in anarchy and everybody is looking out for themselves first and foremost.

Secondly, the peacekeeping operations (be it AMIS or UNAMID) have been unable to bring security to the rebel parties. Even though AMIS enjoyed success earlier on, it was later discredited and UNAMID is not faring any better. And thirdly, almost no attention is being devoted to the roots of the conflict; instead everybody is focussing on deploying troops while little thought is given to why conflict flared up in the first place (except, as one participant put it, when the conflict is portrayed as being between the “good Africans” and the “bad Arabs”). As we can see, there is an enormous gap between theory and reality.

Most importantly, participants unanimously agreed that the **lack of a political framework** is the main reason why there is no peace to keep and that the minimum requirements for a successful peace mission are not met. This was the most recurrent theme of the conference: without a serious political process, the prospects for long-term peace are bleak even with the presence of UNAMID. Many pointed to the CPA as a key opportunity for peace; indeed, it offers a sound decentralised political framework on which to base peace efforts for Darfur. On the other hand, others argued that this agreement, even though it is far-reaching and comprehensive, was not inclusive enough and gave too much to Southern Sudan for Khartoum’s taste: they contended that the government has already made all the concessions it can bear, and that there is little leeway left for Darfur or other unsettled regions of Sudan. In fact, it can be argued that the CPA was the spark prompting the rebels to take up arms against the central regime. Having seen what could be obtained through fighting, they decided that it was the best way to get what they wanted.

However, there is no denying that the CPA is a model to be followed if peace is to be reached in Darfur: it

covers a wide range of issues, from government reforms to wealth-sharing, and sows the seeds for a long-term peace. Unfortunately, it seems that the implementation of the CPA is behind schedule and with the 2011 referendum looming, many are pessimistic over its possibilities for success.

The role of UNAMID

As noted earlier, UNAMID is the new hybrid AU/UN peace mission in Darfur, put into place by Resolution 1769 in 2007. It is led by General Martin Luther Agwai of Nigeria and has been performing duties in Darfur since 31 December 2007. UNAMID was able to replace AMIS because of international pressure to put UN troops on the ground, and also because the latter was becoming a symbol of the failure of the international community in Darfur, lacking resources, support and well-equipped troops.

Its mandate consists principally in protecting its personnel, facilities, installations and equipment, and ensuring the security and freedom of movement of its own personnel and humanitarian workers; supporting early and effective implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement, preventing disruption of its implementation and armed attacks, and protecting civilians, without prejudice to the responsibility of the Government of Sudan (S/RES/1769 2007 for more information). Some participants felt the mandate was ambiguous: does it mean that UNAMID forces can take preemptive actions to protect civilians? Is civilian protection their first objective? On this point, one humanitarian worker pointed out that civilian protection does not seem to be a primordial objective for UNAMID. Indeed, he said it was the last task assigned to UNAMID forces (protection of its personnel, infrastructure, humanitarian workers, etc. coming first) according to the wording of the resolution. He argued that protection of peacekeepers and humanitarian workers is useless if there are no civilians to help or to protect.

Moreover, UNAMID faces many problems that complicate its chances for success. First of all, as previously mentioned, UNAMID is far from being fully established (9,000 out of 26,000 troops). Its deployment has been much slower than expected and one participant thought that it wouldn't be completed before 2009, and then only *if* Sudan "played ball". One of the main problems is that Khartoum insists on having an all-African mission; *per se*, there is nothing wrong with that. Unfortunately, as Sudan's government knows, it is impossible to deploy such a force because African countries, even if they contribute heavily to peacekeeping missions, do not have enough well-equipped and trained soldiers to make up a force of 26,000. Furthermore, Darfur is a logistical nightmare for a peacekeeping force. It needs to cover a territory the size of France, with helicopters it does not yet have, soldiers that are not fully deployed, and an airport in El-Fashir that is in poor condition (it was not known, for example, what kinds of planes could land safely at the airport, or the capacity it could bear or when it would be fully functional).

Also, there is a risk that in the chaotic environment that characterises Darfur at the moment, UNAMID could be drawn into a protracted guerilla war; in other words, it could become another belligerent in the conflict. Its neutrality and impartiality is somewhat questionable and UNAMID does not currently have the means to *enforce* peace, nor the political will to sustain robust engagement. Finally, there is also the possibility that Darfurians could find this international force untrustworthy. As one participant put it, that is what happened with AMIS: it was only concerned about protecting itself, not the population, which caused a crisis of confidence. The population came to see the international force as just as threatening as any rebel group or government militia. There are already signs that UNAMID is no different, with many Darfurians no longer trusting the international community.

Having discussed the problems that UNAMID faces, the question of how success should be measured must also be considered. How do we define whether

UNAMID has been successful or not? What can realistically be expected? Is it capable of bringing peace to Darfur? Can it control the rebel groups and government militias? Will it be able to adequately protect civilians?

Many participants were pessimistic about its chance for success, arguing that without a due political process, prospects for peace are limited. Some even thought that UNAMID was simply an alibi allowing Western governments to watch and ignore the political problems (by sending troops, they appear to be taking action, but in reality they do nothing to help resolve the crisis). One participant also said that UNAMID is either too late or too early, and that the timing of its deployment would have been perfect right after the signing of the DPA. Now, without a peace to keep, it cannot be effective.

So if UNAMID cannot bring peace to Darfur, what can be expected of it? Some participants thought that with 26,000 troops (if and when fully deployed), it could at least stabilise the situation on the ground. It could also police IDP camps (the police in IDP camps are currently seen as agents of the government), protect humanitarian convoys and establish safe areas. Practically, the issues are to alleviate the people's suffering and the assault on their livelihoods. Others were more pessimistic: they thought that UNAMID was mainly an alibi and that its chances of success were as low as 10 percent. In other words, it was almost set up to fail.

That said, there were still optimists who thought that UNAMID offered a ray of hope, arguing that it was much too early to say if the mission was going to work or not. It is a new mission and, without harbouring unreasonably high expectations, it can achieve a certain measure of success. For example, it can make Darfur a more secure place and greatly help those in need of humanitarian assistance. Participants seemed to agree that the UN and the AU were the best organisations to do the job, and that it would be better to avoid the presence of the US, NATO or the EU.

Conclusion

In conclusion, is there an ending in sight for Darfur? And if so, can it be achieved in the near and foreseeable future? In the absence of a political process and a real commitment from all parties to stop the violence, there does not seem to be any clear solution on the horizon. One participant argued that it is precisely for this reason that the international community is opting to send soldiers: in the absence of a real commitment from the international community to address the causes of the conflict, and to commit to a viable political process, it has resorted to the quick-fix solution of sending a peacekeeping mission even though there is no peace to keep.

Furthermore, nobody seems to have thought about what a post-war Darfur should look like. Is UNAMID a good thing for the long-term future of Darfur? Only time will tell. And in spite of the pessimism, there is still hope that the mission will register some success. Moreover, efforts to find a

political settlement to the crisis cannot be abandoned. The international community must work to resolve its differences and elaborate an articulate, coherent and long-term strategy to end the conflict.

Though the US, China and Russia are the key players in the Security Council, mid-level powers with no obvious strategic stakes in the region - like Canada, Spain, and the Scandinavian countries - play an increasingly important role in conflict resolution. It is not solely the responsibility of the major powers to resolve conflict; others must also try to exert their influence. The emergence of a coalition of the willing, the adoption of a new doctrine to prevent genocide - "the responsibility to protect" - and new mandates given to regional organisations are all tools the mid-level powers can use to influence and push for a more effective strategy. Canada has been the promoter of the new doctrine permitting last resort intervention without a Security Council resolution, while Spain is increasing its weight in the EU as it prepares to become more active in conflict resolution, especially in the Balkans and Africa.

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