

Editorial

Darfur and the “Responsibility to Protect”

A strange alliance has taken shape in the U.S. between leading Zionist organizations, the religious Right, the mainstream churches, pacifist organizations and various student-based peace groups around the demand for “international” intervention in Darfur. This alliance is also making some headway in Canada.

According to the groups involved in the “Save Darfur” campaign, government-backed “Arab” militias, known as the Jangawiid, are committing genocide and ethnic cleansing against defenceless “Africans”. It does not appear to bother these groups that these claims are the invention of the U.S. State Department and certain neo-conservative American journalists nor that the United Nations has refuted them.

According to UN reports, what is actually occurring in Darfur is a civil war between rebel

forces and the government of Sudan, the “Arabs” and “Africans” are virtually impossible to distinguish on ethnic, linguistic or religious grounds and although both sides are responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity they are not guilty of genocide or ethnic cleansing. Furthermore, while some of the “Save Darfur” groups accuse China of supporting the Sudanese government in exchange for access to the oil fields in Darfur, none of them has anything to say about the widespread reports that the U.S. and its African allies have, from the beginning, been arming and financing the rebel forces, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM).

Many of those calling for “international” (meaning U.S.) intervention to end the so-called “genocide” in Darfur, including former Canadian General Romeo

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Commentary

Bush Fails to Reassert American Hegemony During Latin American Tour

U.S. President George Bush embarked on a week-long tour of Latin America on March 8, with stops in Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico. The trip was seen by most analysts as an attempt to reassert American control in the region while undermining the growing influence of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. Over the past few years Chavez has been instrumental in establishing regional economic and political alliances which exclude the U.S.

In each country Bush was met by large demonstrations opposing everything from the current American intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan to previous military dictatorships set up

by U.S. imperialism in the region. At every stop reporters asked him to comment about what was characterized as growing anger in the region with his government and the extremely pointed criticisms levelled against his regime by Chavez. Not surprisingly, Bush refused to answer the questions, trying instead to position his visit as an opportunity to build bridges. For example, he declared, “My message to the people in our neighbourhood is that we care about the human condition and that we believe the human condition can be improved in a variety of ways. One is investment and so the question is how can we have constructive dialogue

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Dallaire, point to the failure of the international community to intervene in Rwanda to prevent the massacres of Tutsis there. They insist that “we” should not make the same mistake again and that the “international” community has a responsibility to protect the citizens of a sovereign country if the government of that country fails to do so.

However, this argument covers up the fact that there was an enormous amount of foreign intervention in Rwanda before, during and after the massacres. On the one hand were various Belgian corporations and officials backing the Hutu-dominated government and advising it not to accept a peace agreement with the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). On the other hand were the Americans and their Ugandan allies who were arming the RPF and advising it not to accept a power-sharing arrangement with the Rwandan government. The U.S. blocked every attempt by UN peacekeeping forces to defuse the situation, not because U.S. president Bill Clinton was afraid of being labelled an interventionist, but because such a force may have prevented the American-backed RPF from seizing total control of Rwanda.

Similarly, the massacre of approximately four million people in the Congo over the past several years has not been due to a lack of intervention by the big powers, but due to their intervention in support of one or another warlord. In fact, it would be a challenge to identify any African conflict during the past 500 years which was not the result of direct or indirect intervention by the big colonial and imperialist powers.

The “Save Darfur” coalition also claims that large numbers of women and young girls in Darfur are being raped by the Jangwiid and that “international” intervention is needed to put an end to these crimes. However, in Somalia a similar situation existed with large numbers of crimes, including rapes, being committed by the various warlords and their soldiers. The Islamic Courts Union (ICU) gradually established law and order in the country, punished the warlords for their crimes and eventually defeated them militarily in 2006. However, the U.S.-backed Ethiopian army invaded Somalia at the end of 2006, overthrew the ICU government and put the criminal warlords back into power. What makes the “Save Darfur” coalition think that those who put rapists and murderers back in power in Somalia and whose

soldiers are raping and killing women in Iraq and Afghanistan are going to protect the women of Darfur?

Civil war had been raging in the southern part of Sudan for over 20 years. This civil war had its roots in the Cold War machinations of the U.S. and Soviet Union, and the rebel forces led by the Sudan People’s Liberation Army are reported to have been receiving support from neighbouring countries. While this civil war in the south was going on, the situation in Darfur in the west of Sudan was relatively peaceful.

However, beginning in the 1970s, tensions in Darfur increased between nomadic herders and farmers. These two sections of the people had been sharing land for centuries - with the nomadic herders grazing their cattle on the farmers’ land during the period between harvest and spring planting. However, increasing drought and desertification since the 1970s generated competition and conflicts between the two groups over dwindling water supplies. At times these conflicts became violent, but the general situation in the region was far from being a civil war.

In 2003, just as progress was being made towards a peace agreement in southern Sudan, a rebel uprising began in Darfur. The Darfur rebels of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) were well equipped; they had more modern weapons than the Sudanese army and drove hundreds of Toyota Land Cruisers. As a result, they inflicted heavy losses on government troops during the early years of the conflict. Unable to defeat the rebels with conventional warfare, the Sudanese government responded by arming some of the nomadic tribes that had been in conflict for many years with the tribes supporting the SLA.

The peaceful resolution of the various conflicts in Sudan does not coincide with the interests of the U.S., which has been looking for a pretext to intervene there since the Clinton administration. As in Iraq, the U.S. wants to station its troops in Darfur in order to control which companies are granted access to the oil resources there. It was, therefore, essential for American interests to maintain a state of chaos and civil war in Sudan in order to justify sending troops there. Furthermore, if the SLA had been armed and instigated by anyone else except the U.S. and/or its African allies, the U.S. would have been the first to condemn such “foreign intervention”. In other

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with our neighbours as to how to spread the benefits of investment.”

In what many Latin American journalists felt was an oblique reference to the massive investments in social spending Venezuela is making in the region, including providing poverty-stricken countries with cheap oil and Venezuelan-trained doctors and educators, Bush told a reporter in Brazil that aid to Latin America from the “generous U.S. taxpayer” has reached \$1.6 billion, “and most of the money is aimed at social justice programs, programs like education and health care.” His visit, he said, was “very constructive and very hopeful and very positive, and the reason why is because we’ve all got so much in common. There’s a lot more that unites us than divides us.”

However, Bush’s attempts to shore up support for America in the region were largely futile. While he signed a number of trade and investment protocols and announced some new aid spending, his own State Department admitted that this was largely symbolic. Signing the first of these agreements, on ethanol and bio-fuel alternatives in Brazil, Bush

stressed what he described as “shared values” between Brazilians and Americans.

Brazilian President Lula, for his part, called on Bush to cooperate in the social development of Latin America while respecting the “political decisions of each state.” Latin America’s relationship with the U.S. will be stronger, Lula said, on the basis of mutual respect. “Each [must] respect the sovereign political decisions of each state,” and only then could they work on partnerships together to alleviate poverty.

President Chavez, meanwhile, used the American president’s tour as a reason to launch his own counter-tour, visiting and announcing trade and aid deals in Bolivia, Nicaragua, Jamaica, Haiti and Argentina. In each country he visited Chavez received a hero’s welcome and was greeted by tens of thousands of supporters.

While in Argentina, Chavez spoke at a massive rally opposing Bush’s trip and announced the creation of the Bank of the South, a regional alternative to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Argentina, Bolivia and Venezuela have already signed on, he told the crowd. The aim of the Bank of the South will be to break the cycle of foreign debt which

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words, the current civil war in Darfur was organized by the very “international” forces that the “Save Darfur” coalition is calling upon to intervene there to put an end to the “genocide”. This is equivalent to calling upon Nazi Germany in 1939 to intervene in Czechoslovakia to save the German settlers there from “persecution” at the hands of the Czechs.

Those who are calling for “international” intervention are, therefore, objectively supporting the interests of U.S. imperialism in establishing its control over the entire region of central Africa. They are playing, knowingly or unknowingly, the same role in Sudan that various groups played in the case of Afghanistan when they called on the “international” community to put an end to the oppression of women, or in Iraq with the calls to establish democracy, or in the case of Iran where some are calling for “international” intervention to put an end to political persecution. All of these calls are smokescreens to cover up the predatory aims of the U.S. imperialists.

This explains why, when the “Save Darfur” coalition says that “we can’t just sit by and do nothing; we have to do something”, the something they feel compelled to do just happens to coincide with U.S. foreign policy. It also explains why they falsely divide the people of Darfur between “Arabs” and “Africans” in order to fit in nicely with the racist, anti-Arab propaganda of the Bush administration’s War on Terror.

The solutions to the problems in Darfur must be political and economic solutions and must come out of discussions and compromises between the people who have shared that land for millennia. The invasion of Sudan by various foreign powers and the imposition of their “solutions” on the Sudanese people will no more contribute to peace and security in the region than the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq have in those countries. As those situations prove, not only will such an “international” intervention cause an enormous increase in violence and death in the short term, but it could also create a situation in which solutions to these problems may prove impossible to achieve for generations to come.

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has created such economic disaster in the region. "We have paid a countless amount of resources to pay back foreign debt," he said. "In the past 20 or 25 years we have paid more than \$2.2 billion [U.S.] in debt. We have paid back the loans more than three times over."

The contrast between the two presidential tours underscored how unable the Americans have been to restore their control over Latin America. Bush met with foreign leaders behind huge barricades protected by thousands of armed police and soldiers, while Chavez spoke to mass rallies and walked through some of the most wretched neighbourhoods in the region.

History, it appears, caught up to Bush in Latin America. On the eve of his departure, the White House announced that the president's tour would promote "peace and prosperity". For decades the Americans have claimed that their aim in Latin America has been to bring about peace and prosperity. However, the evidence of close to 200 years suggests otherwise. Under the Monroe doctrine, the American policy towards the countries of Latin America was openly colonial. After the Second World War, the approach shifted to a neo-colonial one, under which the Americans trained, funded and kept in place regimes friendly to their interests. These regimes, including dozens of outright military dictatorships, were known throughout the world for the brutal suppression of their peoples.

After the collapse of Soviet Union and the end of the bi-polar division of the world the U.S. approach to Latin America shifted once again. It moved away from supporting military dictatorships to using democratically-elected governments which promised that the adoption of neo-liberal economic policies would bring "peace and prosperity" to the poor and marginalized. However, the subsequent succession of economic disasters in the region - beginning with the collapse of the Mexican peso in the mid-1990s, followed by the disastrous consequences of dollarization in Ecuador and the recession in Argentina - created a serious credibility crisis for the Americans. This crisis coincided with the launch by the Americans, during Clinton's presidency, of the attempt to create the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

When Clinton first spoke about the FTAA in 1994 he confidently predicted that the agreement would be

in place within the decade. Instead, the negotiations have ground to a halt and not a single thing the Americans have done has been able to kick-start the process. Rather, America's former client-states have elected leaders who have openly challenged the neo-liberal prescriptions. While Chavez has been the most vocal, he has been joined by Bolivia's Evo Morales, Argentina's Nestor Kirchner, Ecuador's Rafael Correa and Paraguayan President Nicanor Duarte. They did not hesitate to make their opinions of the U.S. known during the two presidential tours.

While Bush was being welcomed at an official reception in Mexico, Kirchner told reporters he was delighted to welcome Chavez to Argentina. "I welcomed the President of the fellow Republic of Venezuela, who acted in solidarity with Argentina; who came when Argentina was in need and helped us. At a time when big countries did not come forward." Duarte described Chavez as "the President most willing to help" and, in case his words were not crystal clear, went on to criticize U.S. foreign policy under Bush, calling it "terrible" and condemning the invasion of Iraq and the illegal American concentration camp in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. Asked about Bush's promise to increase investment in Latin America, Duarte replied that he would believe it "when there is technology transfer, when tariff barriers are lifted and when he stops treating our fellow citizens in a miserable way when they try to travel to his country."

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