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Sudan: Hybrid Peacekeeping Force for Darfur Must Comply With UN Requirements

In August of this year the United Nations Security Council voted to send UN peacekeepers to Darfur, where the United States has accused the government of Sudan of committing genocide, to supplement a small African Union force.

So far the government of Sudan has refused to allow the UN to deploy this new and much larger peacekeeping mission, forcing the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) to keep its largely ineffective Darfur peacekeeping mission in place. To resolve this dilemma, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in close consultation with leading members of the Security Council and the leadership of the African Union, has come up with the idea of a hybrid UN-AU peacekeeping mission.

Clearly the UN holds a weak hand on Darfur. It has no way to compel Sudan to accept the UN peacekeeping force authorized by Security Council Resolution 1706. Quite the opposite --- Khartoum is forcing the UN to water down its Darfur effort to a level acceptable to Sudan. Faced with Sudan's intransigence, the UN is trying to implement a plan of phased support for peacekeeping in Darfur. Phase 1 is a light support package for AMIS, worth around \$20 million, which is proceeding with the government of Sudan's approval. Phase 2 is a heavy support package, consisting of the deployment of several hundred military, police, and civilian personnel, as well as substantial logistical and aviation assets. According to a November 16 UN statement, Sudan has agreed to Phase 2. Phase 3 is to be the deployment of a hybrid peacekeeping mission.

In the UN vision for this hybrid operation, the UN's Special Representative to Sudan would be jointly appointed by the UN and the AU, as would the Force Commander

and Deputy Force Commander. UN assets and command and control would backstop what would still be a largely African peacekeeping force. UN peacekeeping assessments would pay for the operation. In keeping with Resolution 1706, the number of troops should be about 17,000, plus 3,000 police, a significant increase from the current AMIS force of about 7,000.

The UN says that for any action it takes in Darfur to be effective there must be three things in place: a viable ceasefire; a viable political negotiating process involving all the parties to the conflict, including ones that did not sign the May Darfur Peace Agreement; and an effective peacekeeping force to buttress the first two elements.

An immediate problem is the lack of a ceasefire, while attempts to revive the political peace process have yielded no concrete results in recent months. In terms of the peacekeeping force, the UN insists that it won't accept a force that lacks the mandate, troops, equipment, and command structure to be effective. This means the design of the hybrid force must comply with the general requirements outlined in the Secretary-General's July 2006 report that defined the scope and mandate of the UN operation in Darfur.

According to the July report, the UN mission in Darfur would have as its abiding priority the protection of civilians, and the core of this would consist of mobile infantry

battalions. The mission must have elements of its command and control system in Darfur itself. It must be equipped with high-mobility ground vehicles and a significant air component. The force must be capable and ready to deal proactively with spoilers, including in a pre-emptive manner. This will require surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, and air and ground rapid reaction forces with enough military power to deter or defeat any threats. The report provides many further details, showing that the UN has done its homework and has clearly defined the full requirements for an effective peacekeeping mission in Darfur.

The UN is now waiting for the government of Sudan to report back on various concerns it has with the hybrid mission concept. Herein lies the problem. Since Khartoum continues to oppose the UN operation envisioned by Resolution 1706, it is hard to understand why it would approve much the same thing cloaked as a joint UN-AU mission. In fact, there are already signs of disagreement between Khartoum and the UN about the troop and police numbers and about UN command and control elements. Sudan also said it should be consulted concerning the appointment of the Special Representative and the Force Commander.

The AU must approve a mandate for this hybrid operation. Given Sudanese pressure, it is an open question whether the AU will approve a mandate that meets the requirements of the UN. Even with an appropriate mandate, there is another problem. If the political peace process necessary for the UN peacekeeping mission to succeed continues to founder, it brings into play the bigger problem of the political will of the potential troop contributing countries. Governments providing troops to AMIS do not want those troops to engage in major hostilities, a problem that could easily afflict the hybrid operation, which will be largely African.

A fundamental problem in pushing forward with a peacekeeping force for Darfur is that the UN is in the untenable position of trying to convince the party most responsible for the violence to be a partner in the peace process. In a failed state this may work, because with the deployment of a robust peace operation the UN may gain the upper hand over ragtag rebel groups acting to spoil the peace. The UN is in no such position in Darfur --- there, the government of Sudan clearly holds the upper hand. The prosecution of genocide in Darfur, the lack of consent for a UN peace operation in Darfur, and the failure of the political peace

process in Darfur are the result in part or whole of decisions made by the government of Sudan.

For three years Khartoum has successfully manipulated the divisions in the international community, blocking effective action in Darfur and ensuring that the human misery, ethnic cleansing, and mass killings continue. Sudan has obstructed AMIS with a crippling curfew and other restrictions. There are no signs that Khartoum is inclined to take a radically different path concerning Darfur. Sudan's leaders are able to listen patiently to and then ignore the statements of the international community because there is no credible threat on the horizon that would force them to pay attention. No country or organization that can mount a credible military threat against Sudan is inclined to do so. So, although tough-headed diplomacy might bring about change, this is likely only if there is a credible threat of a vigorous response should the killing continue.

On November 20, in a public presentation at the Brookings Institution in Washington, the U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan, Andrew Natsios, stated that he assumed the government of Sudan wanted an effective Darfur peacekeeping force. The actions of the Sudanese government for the past three years belie this assumption. Mr. Natsios further stated that in the event of further Sudanese obstruction, while the killing in Darfur continues, then the U.S. has a "Plan B" to respond. At this juncture, one can only wonder if Plan B will be any more vigorous than the ineffectual U.S. response to date.

If Sudan succeeds in substantially weakening the mandate, troop levels, and command and control structure for the UN-AU peacekeeping force in Darfur, the UN should not take the attitude that this is the best possible option under the circumstances and accept what would only be a larger AMIS. There is no point in action taken for the sake of taking action. The UN has correctly said that peacekeeping in Darfur must be effective, and it should stick to that goal.

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