

# The U.S. Role in Darfur, Sudan

Oil reserves rivaling those of Saudi Arabia?

By [Sara Flounders](#)

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Global Research, June 06, 2006

International Action Center 6 June 2006

What is fueling the campaign now sweeping the U.S. to “Stop Genocide in Darfur”? Campus organizations have suddenly begun organizing petitions, meetings and calls for divestment. A demonstration was held April 30 on the Mall in Washington, D.C., to “Save Darfur.”

Again and again it is said that “something” must be done. “Humanitarian forces” and “U.S. peacekeepers” must be deployed immediately to stop “ethnic cleansing.” UN troops or NATO forces must be used to stop “genocide.” The U.S. government has a “moral responsibility to prevent another Holocaust.”

Outrage is provoked by media stories of mass rapes and photos of desperate refugees. The charge is that tens of thousands of African people are being killed by Arab militias backed by the Sudanese government. Sudan is labeled as both a “terrorist state” and a “failed state.” Even at anti-war rallies, signs have been distributed proclaiming “Out of Iraq—Into Darfur.” Full-page ads in the New York Times have repeated the call.

Who is behind the campaign and what actions are they calling for?

Even a cursory look at the supporters of the campaign shows the prominent role of right-wing evangelical Christians and major Zionist groups to “Save Darfur.”

A Jerusalem Post article of April 27 headlined “U.S. Jews Leading Darfur Rally Planning” described the role of prominent Zionist organizations in organizing the April 30 rally. A full-page ad for the rally in the New York Times was signed by a number of Jewish organizations, including the UJA—Federation of NY and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs.

But it wasn’t just Zionist groups that called it. The rally was sponsored by a coalition of 164 organizations that included the National Association of Evangelicals, the World Evangelical Alliance and other religious groups that have been the strongest supporters of the Bush administration’s invasion of Iraq. The Kansas-based evangelical group Sudan Sunrise helped arrange buses and speakers, did extensive fund raising and co-hosted a 600-person dinner.

This was hardly an anti-war or social justice rally. The organizers had a personal meeting with President George W. Bush just before the rally. He told them: “I welcome your participation. And I want to thank the organizers for being here.”

Originally the demonstration was projected to draw a turnout of more than 100,000. Media coverage generously reported “several thousands,” ranging from 5,000 to 7,000. The rally was overwhelming white. Despite sparse numbers, it got wide media coverage, focusing on celebrity speakers like Academy Award winner George Clooney. Top Democrats and

Republicans gave it their blessing, including U.S. Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.), House minority leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer and New Jersey Gov. Jon Corzine. Corzine, by the way, spent \$62 million of his own money to get elected.

The corporate media gave this rally more prominence than either the anti-war rally of 300,000 in New York City on the day before or the millionfold demonstrations across the country for immigrant rights on the day after.

U.S. Ambassador to the UN John Bolton, former Secretary of State Gen. Colin Powell, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Gen. Wesley Clark and British Prime Minister Tony Blair have all argued in favor of intervention in Sudan.

These leading architects of imperialist policy often refer to another model when they call for this intervention: the successful “humanitarian” war on Yugoslavia that established a U.S./NATO administration over Kosovo after a massive bombing campaign.

The Holocaust Museum in Washington issued a “genocide alert”—the first such alert ever issued—and 35 evangelical Christian leaders signed a letter urging President Bush to send U.S. troops to stop genocide in Darfur. A special national curriculum for students was established to generate grassroots support for U.S. intervention.

Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) have embraced the campaign. Liberal voices such as Amy Goodman of Democracy Now, Rabbi Michael Lerner of TIKKUN and Human Rights Watch have also pushed the campaign to “Save Darfur.”

#### Diversion from Iraq debacle

The criminal invasion and massive bombing of Iraq, the destruction of its infrastructure that left the people without water or basic electricity, and the horrible photos of the U.S. military’s use of torture at Abu Ghraib prison created a world outcry. At its height, in September 2004, then Secretary of State Gen. Colin Powell went to Sudan and announced to the world that the crime of the century—“a genocide”—was taking place there. The U.S. solution was to demand the United Nations impose sanctions on one of the poorest countries on earth and that U.S. troops be sent there as “peacekeepers.”

But the rest of the UN Security Council was unwilling to accept this view, the U.S. “evidence” or the proposed action.

The campaign against Sudan increased even as evidence was being brought forward that the U.S. invasion of Iraq was based on a total lie. The same media that had given credibility to the U.S. government’s claim that it was justified in invading Iraq because that country had “weapons of mass destruction” switched gears to report on “war crimes” by Arab forces in Sudan.

This Darfur campaign accomplishes several goals of U.S. imperialist policy. It further demonizes Arab and Muslim people. It diverts attention from the human rights catastrophe caused by the brutal U.S. war and occupation of Iraq, which has killed and maimed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis.

It is also an attempt to deflect attention from the U.S. financing and support of Israel's war on the Palestinian people.

Most important, it opens a new front in the determination of U.S. corporate power to control the entire region.

#### U.S. interest in Sudan

Sudan is the largest country in Africa in area. It is strategically located on the Red Sea, immediately south of Egypt, and borders on seven other African countries. It is about the size of Western Europe but has a population of only 35 million people.

Darfur is the western region of Sudan. It is the size of France, with a population of just 6 million.

Newly discovered resources have made Sudan of great interest to U.S. corporations. It is believed to have oil reserves rivaling those of Saudi Arabia. It has large deposits of natural gas. In addition, it has one of the three largest deposits of high-purity uranium in the world, along with the fourth-largest deposits of copper.

Unlike Saudi Arabia, however, the Sudanese government has retained its independence of Washington. Unable to control Sudan's oil policy, the U.S. imperialist government has made every effort to stop its development of this valuable resource. China, on the other hand, has worked with Sudan in providing the technology for exploration, drilling, pumping and the building of a pipeline and buys much of Sudan's oil.

U.S. policy revolves around shutting down the export of oil through sanctions and inflaming national and regional antagonisms. For over two decades U.S. imperialism supported a separatist movement in the south of Sudan, where oil was originally found. This long civil war drained the central government's resources. When a peace agreement was finally negotiated, U.S. attention immediately switched to Darfur in western Sudan.

Recently, a similar agreement between the Sudanese government and rebel groups in Darfur was rejected by one of the groups, so the fighting continues. The U.S. poses as a neutral mediator and keeps pressing Khartoum for more concessions but "through its closest African allies helped train the SLA and JEM Darfuri rebels that initiated Khartoum's violent reaction." ([www.afrol.com](http://www.afrol.com))

Sudan has one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the world. Over 400 ethnic groups have their own languages or dialects. Arabic is the one common language. Greater Khartoum, the largest city in the country, has a population of about 6 million. Some 85 percent of the Sudanese population is involved in subsistence agriculture or raising livestock.

The U.S. corporate media is unanimous in simplistically describing the crisis in Darfur as atrocities committed by the Jan jawid militias, supported by the central government in Khartoum. This is described as an "Arab" assault on "African" people.

This is a total distortion of reality. As the Black Commentator, Oct. 27, 2004, points out: "All parties involved in the Darfur conflict—whether they are referred to as 'Arab' or as 'African,' are equally indigenous and equally Black. All are Muslim and all are local." The whole population of Darfur speaks Arabic, along with many local dialects. All are Sunni Muslim.

## Drought, famine and sanctions

The crisis in Darfur is rooted in intertribal fighting. A desperate struggle has developed over increasingly scarce water and grazing rights in a vast area of Northern Africa that has been hit hard by years of drought and growing famine.

Darfur has over 35 tribes and ethnic groups. About half the people are small subsistence farmers, the other half nomadic herders. For hundreds of years the nomadic population grazed their herds of cattle and camels over hundreds of miles of grassy lowlands. Farmers and herders shared wells. For over 5,000 years, this fertile land sustained civilizations in both western Darfur and to the east, all along the Nile River.

Now, due to the drought and the encroaching great Sahara Desert, there isn't enough grazing land or enough farmland in what could be the breadbasket of Africa. Irrigation and development of Sudan's rich resources could solve many of these problems. U.S. sanctions and military intervention will solve none of them.

Many people, especially children, have died in Sudan of totally preventable and treatable diseases because of a U.S. cruise missile attack, ordered by President Bill Clinton on Aug. 20, 1998, on the El Shifa pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum. This plant, which had produced cheap medications for treating malaria and tuberculosis, provided 60 percent of the available medicine in Sudan.

The U.S. claimed Sudan was operating a VX poison gas facility there. It produced no evidence to back up the charge. This simple medical facility, totally destroyed by the 19 missiles, was not rebuilt nor did Sudan receive a penny of compensation.

## UN/NATO role in Sudan

Presently 7,000 African Union troops are in Darfur. Their logistical and technical back-up is provided by U.S. and NATO forces. In addition, thousands of UN personnel are overseeing refugee camps for hundreds of thousands dislocated by the drought, famine and war. All of these outside forces do more than hand out needed food. They are a source of instability. As capitalist would-be conquerors have done for hundreds of years, they consciously play one group off against another.

U.S. imperialism is heavily involved in the entire region. Chad, which is directly west of Darfur, last year participated in a U.S.-organized international military exercise that, according to the U.S. Defense Department, was the largest in Africa since World War II. Chad is a former French colony, and both French and U.S. forces are heavily involved in funding, training and equipping the army of its military ruler, Idriss Deby, who has supported rebel groups in Darfur.

For more than half a century, Britain ruled Sudan, encountering widespread resistance. British colonial policy was rooted in divide-and-conquer tactics and in keeping its colonies underdeveloped and isolated in order to plunder their resources.

U.S. imperialism, which has replaced the European colonial powers in many parts of the world, in recent years has been sabotaging the economic independence of countries trying to emerge from colonial underdevelopment. Its main economic weapons have been sanctions combined with "structural adjustment" demands made by the International Monetary Fund, which it controls. In return for loans, the target governments must cut their

budgets for development of infrastructure.

How can demands from organizations in the West for sanctions, leading to further underdevelopment and isolation, solve any of these problems?

Washington has often used its tremendous power in the UN Security Council to get resolutions endorsing its plans to send U.S. troops into other countries. None were on humanitarian missions.

U.S. troops carrying the UN flag invaded Korea in 1950 in a war that resulted in more than 4 million deaths. Still flying that flag, they have occupied and divided the Korean peninsula for over 50 years.

At the urging of the U.S., UN troops in 1961 were deployed to the Congo, where they played a role in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the country's first prime minister.

The U.S. was able to get a UN mandate in 1991 for its massive bombing of the entire Iraqi civilian infrastructure, including water purification plants, irrigation and food processing plants—and for the 13 years of starvation sanctions that resulted in the deaths of over 1.5 million Iraqis.

UN troops in Yugoslavia and in Haiti have been a cover for U.S. and European intervention and occupation—not peace or reconciliation.

The U.S. and European imperialist powers are responsible for the genocidal slave trade that decimated Africa, the genocide of the Indigenous population of the Americas, the colonial wars and occupations that looted three-quarters of the globe. It was German imperialism that was responsible for the genocide of the Jewish people. To call for military intervention by these same powers as the answer to conflicts among the people of Darfur is to ignore 500 years of history.

Sara Flounders went to Sudan just after the bombing of the El Shifa pharmaceutical plant in 1998 with John Parker as part of an International Action Center fact-finding delegation led by Ramsey Clark.

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