

NO FLY ZONE OVER DARFUR: KEEP THE PRESSURE ON SUDAN

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Omar al-Bashir, the [president] of Sudan, is famous for the divide and conquer strategy [that] he uses to keep his opponents off-guard. Now the U.S. humanitarian community seems to be using this tactic against itself, as divisions arise over the wisdom of imposing a no-fly zone over Darfur.

() Several humanitarian organizations and commentators publicly oppose a no-fly zone, saying that it would destroy the one international success in Darfur—the establishment of a humanitarian lifeline that is sustaining more than two million Darfurians displaced by violence.

Unfortunately, this debate is distracting and possibly destructive.

Most humanitarian workers believe in the Responsibility to Protect, a doctrine that calls for a series of actions, starting with humanitarian aid and running through diplomacy, economic sanctions, and, if necessary, the use of military force, to compel a country to protect its own people or allow the UN and its members to do so. Military force is a last resort, but the threat of its use makes all the other actions more credible. For the last four years, humanitarian agencies have been urging the Bush administration and the UN to do more to end the death and displacement in Darfur, yet some are now afraid against all evidence that the U.S. might precipitously impose a no-fly zone over Darfur. Announcing that we are unilaterally removing the threat of military action makes about as much sense as one team announcing that it won't throw any passes in a football game.

In its 2006 report on Save Darfur, the International Crisis Group argued that it is premature to use military force in Darfur because the UN and its members had not yet exhausted all diplomatic and other nonmilitary options to bring about an end to the fighting. That is still the case. Military force is not an appropriate or acceptable response, even to genocide, until all nonmilitary measures have been tried, but it would undermine the Responsibility to Protect to remove military force from the table at the beginning or in the middle of diplomatic negotiations.

The Responsibility to Protect is a new and fragile doctrine that needs to be strengthened, not weakened. The humanitarian community will hurt itself in the long run if it perhaps prolongs the suffering of the very populations it seeks to protect by restricting responses under the Responsibility to Protect.

() Efforts by the U.S. and the UN to end the fighting in Darfur have been unimaginative, inconsistent and unsuccessful. It will not help the humanitarian community if we appear divided and uncertain about how best to pursue the Responsibility to Protect. We need to support policies that make diplomats more effective, not weaken them further.

Full text available at:

<http://www.refugeesinternational.org/blog/2007/07/no-fly-zone-over-darfur-keep-pressure.html>