

By Mark Burgess
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In recent months, the European Union has sought to enact laws banning the denial of past genocides. As for the existing one in Darfur, they have been far less active.

() Given that the failure to act in Darfur is a denial in itself, the union as a whole would stand accused if the genocide-denial laws sought by its current chair were followed through to their logical conclusion.

The EU's inaction is doubly damning considering that in 2005 all its members (along with other world leaders) accepted a concept that, if practiced, would prove the international community's best defense against mass atrocity crimes.

() This concept, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), arose shortly before the world became transfixed by the terrorist attacks on America of Sept. 11, 2001. It sought to reconcile the tensions between the international community's so-called "right of humanitarian intervention" and state sovereignty, which, it was often argued, precluded any such interference.

() In Darfur, prevention has failed while the Sudanese government has clearly abdicated its responsibility to protect -- an assertion that needs no further argument here.

() Targeted sanctions against the Sudanese government or other involved parties trying to act as a spoiler in peace negotiations should also be enacted, while diplomatic pressure on other players who could assist in solving the crisis, like Russia and China, should likewise be applied. If the European Union acts with one voice on such issues, its collective power will act as a force multiplier.

() Despite this, it is unlikely that such methods alone will suffice. Military intervention, or the credible threat of it, will also probably be needed. A no-fly zone is certainly called for. The more dangerous and difficult option of an intervention with ground troops should not be ruled out either.

Here again, the European Union has much to offer. Any such deployment to the region will pose huge political, logistical and operational challenges. But EU military elements - such as one of the newly commissioned battlegroups - could, acting alone or in conjunction with NATO or other forces, apply the needed pressure or buy time for other initiatives to play out.

Armed force, while a last resort, must not be ruled out. Khartoum is unlikely to be deterred or coerced by economic sanctions and diplomatic efforts unless these are backed up by the credible threat of military intervention. Such intervention, in Darfur or elsewhere, is never preferable to other courses of action - except that sometimes it is the best bad choice.

Here again, the European Union seems to be in denial, making a virtue out of a necessity when it comes to soft power and often appearing to prefer this option over all else.

Speaking in 1991 of the Yugoslav conflict, Luxembourg's foreign minister, Jacques Poos, declared: "The hour of Europe has come," and was roundly ridiculed. However, in a sense he was right. Europe just failed to recognize and discharge its responsibility.

Sixteen years and 15 countries later, much the same is happening with Darfur. The European Union has a responsibility to protect. It remains to be seen if it will.

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