

HOW can the United States best use its monthlong turn as president of the United Nations Security Council, which it assumes tomorrow? It could start by devoting itself to ending the violence in the Darfur region of western Sudan -- violence that President Bush has characterized as genocide.

There is precedent for such action. The last time the United States assumed the rotating presidency of the 15-member Security Council, it made a real contribution to peace in the region. John C. Danforth, then the ambassador to the United Nations, brought the entire Security Council to Kenya to pressure the government in Khartoum and the insurgents in the south to end their 21-year civil war. The tactic worked. Shortly afterward, Khartoum and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement signed a comprehensive peace agreement.

Unfortunately, that agreement did nothing to end a separate conflict in Darfur, where government-backed Arab militias, in response to insurgent attacks, have driven more than 2.2 million people, primarily African farmers, from their land and bombed, burned and pillaged hundreds of villages. By some estimates, more than 200,000 people have died in the last three years.

John Bolton, the current American ambassador to the United Nations, has called for bold action in Darfur but has provided no real leadership for more effective moves to stop the violence. This month, Mr. Bolton should follow Mr. Danforth's example and schedule a meeting of the Council in Darfur. This would focus the world's attention on a war in which civilians are the primary targets and directly involve the Council in the push toward peace.

(...)

Right now, there are 7,000 African Union peacekeepers in the region. But this force is simply insufficient to do the job. Only by sending United Nations troops can we possibly bring some measure of peace and stability to Darfur.

This won't be easy. Details about the size, mandate and cost of a new United Nations force in Darfur need to be worked out; opposition from Khartoum's allies, Russia and China, which can veto any Security Council action, may need to be overcome. But as Security Council president, Mr. Bolton should push for enough peacekeepers -- possibly backed by Western airpower -- to prevent attacks against civilians.

Mr. Bolton, who has called for stronger enforcement of arms embargoes against Sudan, should demand the release of an unpublished United Nations study listing those countries that ship weapons to rebels and Khartoum-backed militias. Then the Council should use this information to punish sanctions scofflaws.

The United States has a vexing and inconsistent record on Sudan. Periods of engagement have been followed by longer, and troubling, periods of inaction. Now, with a month to lead the Security Council, the United States has a chance to show the world that we can do more than just talk about genocide.

Kenneth H. Bacon is the president of Refugees International

http://www.sudantribune.com/article.php3?id_article=13866