

Crisis Alert: Commentators Warn of Renewed Danger of Atrocities in Darfur In 2003, a brutal [campaign](#) by the Sudanese government against Darfuri rebels protesting decades of political and economic marginalization killed over 300,000 people, internally displaced 2.7 million, with another 250,000 seeking refuge abroad. The Sudanese government, enlisting the support of a nomadic militia known as the Janjaweed, inflicted an ethnically-targeted campaign of mass killings, forced displacement, destruction of property, and the use of rape as a weapon of war, leading many in the international community to accuse the Government of Sudan of genocide.

Twelve years later, emerging evidence of new “scorched earth” campaigns in January 2015—following the Government’s “[Decisive Summer](#)” campaign to quash all rebellions in Sudan—have led many commentators to [warn](#) that a “fresh threat of genocide in Darfur” looms. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the uptick in fighting [displaced](#) 430,000 in 2014 alone. More recently, the Sudan Social Development Organization [announced](#) that the Rapid Support Forces (a reconstituted and more [heavily-armed](#) Janjaweed, supported by the Government of Sudan) evacuated or burned 115 villages in January 2015, all while killing and raping civilians and forcing at least [18,000](#) to flee.

The renewed “[specter of atrocities](#)” can be explained by both economic and political calculations. As Phil Orchard [notes](#), the 2011 secession of South Sudan led to Sudan losing 75% of its oil reserves. The Sudanese government may thus be enacting the ruthless campaign in order to consolidate economic power over Darfur, which [possesses](#) oil, crops, livestock, and newly-discovered gold. Meanwhile, with the world focused on Syria, Nigeria, and Islamic terrorism, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir [could](#) be taking advantage of the fact that international interest in Darfur has all but dissipated, and wish to decisively defeat the rebels before presidential elections in April 2015.

Bashir’s gamble may be paying off—the International Criminal Court [suspended](#) its investigation into war crimes in Darfur, while rumors are [circulating](#) that the Security Council may downsize or overhaul the United Nations and African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) when its mandate expires in June 2015.

Despite the well-publicized [failures](#) of UNAMID to report atrocities to the UN—and its unsatisfactory investigation into the alleged mass rape of 200 girls by Sudanese forces in November 2014—many believe that it is critical that the peacekeeping mission stay active in Darfur. As UN Under Secretary-General for peacekeeping Hervé Ladsous stated, “while we

have by no means been perfect in this regard, without us many, many more would have been killed, displaced, put in harm's way." Aicha Elbasri, UNAMID's former spokesperson,

[concurred](#)

, predicting that "ethnically targeted onslaught", mass rapes, displacements, and bombings would increase if the UN doesn't put Darfur back on top of the policy agenda. Otherwise, as Orchard

[cautions](#)

, "the people of Darfur are likely to be forgotten just when they need the world's help again."

To read more about the conflict, read our "[Crisis in Darfur](#)" page or our "[Q & A: The Responsibility to Protect and Darfur](#)"

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