



# News & Views

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## Sudan, Oil, and African Muslim vs. African Muslim

By Enver Masud, Founder and CEO

**The situation in Darfur is tragic**, but it is not genocide—oil may be the real target of those seeking military intervention.

According to Alex de Waal, the “world authority” on Sudan,

“Characterising the Darfur war as ‘Arabs’ versus ‘Africans’ obscures the reality. Darfur’s Arabs are black, indigenous, African and Muslim—just like Darfur’s non-Arabs . . . Until recently, Darfurians used the term ‘Arab’ in its ancient sense of ‘bedouin’. These Arabic-speaking nomads are distinct from the inheritors of the Arab culture of the Nile and the Fertile Crescent.” (The Observer, July 25, 2004)

Sudan’s 40 million population is 70% Sunni Muslim, 25% indigenous beliefs, and 5% Christian. Sudan’s African Muslims killing African Muslims in tribal warfare is tragic, but cannot correctly be described as genocide—the systematic destruction by the government of Sudan of a national, racial, ethnic, or religious group.

Tensions in Darfur, in western Sudan, have existed since the 1970s. Forced by drought and scarce resources, the nomadic cattle herders in the north ventured into lands populated by the more settled communities in the south.

Renewed fighting broke out at the very moment when a peace agreement was about to be signed which would have ended 21 years of conflict between the government of Sudan, and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) in southern Sudan.

Darfur’s tribes rebelled against the government complaining that the Sudan government had failed to develop the area. It is alleged that the rebels, aware of the terms of the proposed peace agreement between the government of Sudan and the SPLA, hoped to strike a favorable deal for themselves.

Southern Darfur, like southern Sudan, is rich in oil. The Chinese National Petroleum Corporation holds the large oil concession in southern Darfur. Chinese soldiers are alleged to be protecting Chinese oil interests.

It is also alleged that the rebels in southern Darfur are getting weapons from outside Sudan. “UN observers say they have better weapons than the Sudanese army, and are receiving supplies by air,” according to Crescent International (UK).

The government of Sudan, after agreeing with UN Secretary General Kofi Anan to a 90-day period to end the conflict, was given 30 days under a UN resolution pushed through by the U.S. and Britain.

Sudan, largely undeveloped, and barely emerging from colonial oppression, has been given a virtually impossible task of pacifying an area the size of France. This may be the pretext for yet another U.S.-British intervention for oil.

In 1996, the U.S. sent nearly \$20 million in surplus U.S. military equipment to Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda to topple the government of Sudan (The Washington Post, November 10, 1996), and it would appear that the U.S. and Britain are now competing with China, Sudan’s largest trading partner, for Sudan’s oil.

What Sudan, and Darfur in particular, need now is humanitarian assistance—not avarice masquerading as altruism.

Meanwhile, the international community remains largely silent about Uganda.

There the Lord’s Resistance Army has killed tens of thousands of people, often mutilating their bodies, displaced more than 1.6 million people in northern Uganda, kidnapped thousands of children, forced many to become soldiers or sex slaves. (VOA, July 29, 2004)



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