

The Origins, Nature and Consequences of the Darfur Crisis, 2003-2010

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Abstract

The mainstay of this paper is on the western Sudanese region of Darfur. Officially balkanised into four administrative states structure, namely, Central Darfur, East Darfur, North Darfur and West Darfur, the region in the Republic of Sudan was a theatre of crisis also known as the “Land Cruisers War” between 2003 and 2010. The crisis was variously described as “ethnic cleansing”, “genocide”, “humanitarian catastrophe”, “humanitarian crisis”, “humanitarian disaster” and so on. These appellations arose from untold destruction, heavy human casualties, hunger, impoverishment and demographic displacement which typified the crisis. Frantic efforts, internal and external, were made to resolve the crisis to no avail. The origins and nature of the crisis were ill-understood, ill-appreciated and by extension, inappropriate strategies were adopted and deployed to contain it. This paper therefore explores the origins, nature and consequences of the crisis. It gleans information from secondary sources of information for historical reconstruction and employs the narrative and analytical methodology for its presentation. The paper found out that the undercurrents in the crisis were fundamentally economic, ethnocentric and racial, howbeit, with an admixture of regional, national and international intrigues, interests and concerns.

Keywords: Crisis, Darfur, Genocide, Humanitarian Catastrophe, *Janjaweed*

Introduction

By the closing decades of the 17th century, British rule in the Sudan started to experience reverberating hiccups. In March, 1881 specifically, Mohammed Ahmad bin Abdallah claimed an extra-sensory visitation from prophet Mohammed with directives to clean up the Sudanese society and purify Islam. From the Island of Aba, the Suffi sectarians disciples set off to accomplish his task as the “guided one” (the Mahdi)¹ through a series of revolts and conquests. The revolts were however, put down by the combined army of the Egyptian and British forces sequel to the beheading of General Charles George Gordon, the British Governor

¹ Andrew S. Natsios, *Sudan, South Sudan and Darfur: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 20.

General at Khartoum on January 25, 1885.² A condominium government of Britain and Egypt was accordingly hoisted in the Sudan until in 1956.³

The history of post-colonial Sudan has been attended by chains of crises. The first Sudanese Civil War lasted from 1956 to 1972 and the Second Civil War spanned from 1983 to 2005, between North and South Sudan.⁴ However, before the end of the Second Civil War, a major crisis erupted in Sudan's western region of Darfur in February, 2003.⁵ The crisis caused a lot of death, population dislocation, as well as refugee and humanitarian crisis in the region. The Arab population in the region, especially the *Janjaweed*, was strongly supported by the central government in Khartoum with weapons and other logistics while the negroid population, still in the region, was at the receiving end. The crisis no doubt attracted international attention and condemnation in an ever-increasing manner. Yet, the international community was hamstrung to act and the crisis continued unabated.

Conceptual Explorations of Crisis

Crisis, in theoretical reckoning, is regarded as a part of humanity. Variegated and conflicting interests, among other issues, are contended to be the harbingers of crisis from the nuclear family level to the international arena. According to Shedrack Gaya Best,

Crisis is an extreme situation of conflict which has reached a turning point... Sometimes, a crisis is de-generated state of conflict, where threats to human security, intense violence characterized by fighting, death, injury, large-scale displacement of population, etc., occur.⁶

A conflictual model, it would be noted, harps on the fact that,

values and norms are not the same for all members of the society but vary according to position and consequent interests. Many forms of social organization provide for more benefits for some groups in the society than for others; conflict between individuals and groups is the inevitable result.⁷

² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³ P. M. Holt, *A Modern History of the Sudan* (London: Widenfeld and Nicholson, 1976), p.112.

⁴ <http://www.crisisgroup.org/jomeindex>. Accessed and retrieved on June 17, 2024.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Shedrack Gaya Best, "The Methods of Conflict Resolution and Transformation" in Shedrack Gaya Best (ed.), *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa*. (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd., 2009), p. 110.

⁷ Margaret Peil, *Consensus and Conflict in African Societies: An Introduction to Sociology* (Essex: Longman Group Ltd., 1977), p. 42.

Similarly, Ekong Ekong, from the prism of sociology, has it that conflict is a form of social interaction in which the actors seek to obtain scarce reward by eliminating or weakening other contenders. This may take the form of a fight, threats, legislation or total annihilation.⁸

As noted earlier, conflict is recognized as a microcosm of crisis. To be sure, crisis has undergone a plethora of expositional analysis and several theories have accordingly birthed from the enterprise. Some of these theories include but not limited to normal developmental crisis, situational crisis, existential crisis, identity crisis and ecosystem crisis.⁹

A cursory look at, and indeed, a comprehension of the tenets and tenor of these aforementioned theories readily indicate that they are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they are considered linked together with a chord of economic undertones mostly. Arguably, when the Darfur crisis is reduced to its *residuum*, it is tendentiously economic with ethnocentric colourations.

Historical Background to the Darfur Crisis

The Sudan, Africa's third biggest country until the creation of South Sudan on July 9, 2011, owes its name to Arab geographers and travelers who described it as *Bilad as Sudan*, meaning, "land of the blacks"¹⁰ as they made active incursions into the area between the 14th and the 17th centuries. "Darfur" is also an Arabic word for the Fur region which is presently peopled by the negroid Fur, Dagu and Meidob Zaghawa as well as Arabs of Tibu and Baggara stocks. The region was part of the ancient Nubian kingdom of Kush which extended to Egypt. "Dar" means "land" and "Darfur" means "Land of the Fur".¹¹ At the time of Arab conquest of Egypt in the 7th century, Nubian suzerainty over Egypt was overthrown. However, through commerce and inter-marriages, nomadic Arab ethnic groups gradually infiltrated into northern Sudan thereby rendering a large chunk of the population Arabic in speech and Arabised in culture.¹²

By the 15th century, the Fur people established a sultanate in the Jabal Marrah mountain region.¹³ In 1821, Mohammed Ali Pasha, Viceroy of Egypt, had brought the Darfur Sultanate under the hegemony of the Turco-Egyptian empire.¹⁴ Turco-Egyptian rule was itself cut short by the Mahdist Revolution led by Mohammed Ahmad Ibn Abdullah, a self-proclaimed religious reformer (Mahdi) between 1881 and 1885. The Mahdist state held sway until the

⁸ Ekong E. Ekong, *Rural Sociology* 2nd Ed. Edition (Uyo: Dove Educational Publishers, 2010), p. 146.

⁹ www.smartstreet.com Accessed on April 16, 2024.

¹⁰ P. M. Holt, *A Modern History of the Sudan*, p. 3.

¹¹ Andrew S. Natsios, *Sudan, South Sudan and Darfur*, p. 125.

¹² Oluwadare Aguda, *Arabism and Pan-Arabism in Sudanese Politics*. (Ile-Ife: Institute of Administration, University of Ife, 1973), p.179.

¹³ P. M Holt, *A Modern History of the Sudan*, p: 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 41-42.

British invasion in 1896, ostensibly, to avenge the killing of General Charles George Gordon, the British Governor-General of Sudan, on January 26, 1885 by the Mahdists.¹⁵

It would be noted that the British invasion of The Sudan was gingered up by other concerns. These included the expeditionary activities of the Italians who were pushing in from Eritrea in 1893; the incursion of the Belgians towards the former Turco-Egyptians provinces of Bahr-al-Ghazal and the Upper Nile in 1894; and the Franco-Congolese Agreement in 1895. Accordingly, the British government authorized the conquest of The Sudan under Sir Herbert Kitchener. By 1899, an Anglo-Egyptian condominium government had been established in The Sudan.¹⁶ The administration had the character of British officials who served at the top echelon of administration; the Egyptian officers served in the middle cadre and the “newly emerging class of educated Sudanese from the Nile River Valley” decorated the lower positions. This remained the status quo for about 60 years until its termination at Sudanese independence in 1956.¹⁷

Causes of the Darfur Crisis

The Darfur region as noted by Richard Crockett, “was actually regarded as one of the wealthier and more peaceful parts of the country”. However, it also “shared all the resentments of other regional Sudanese against the riverain Arab elite in the centre of the country”.¹⁸

Several reasons have been advanced for the outbreak of the Darfur crisis. Among the prominent ones include the issue of racism, land dispute between the pastoral *Janjaweed* and the sedentary negroid farmers, water sources for both antagonists and the support of the government to the *Janjaweed*.

As noted earlier, the human configuration in the region of Darfur was quite a mixed one. On one side of the divide were the negroid Fur, Dagu, Massaleit, and Meidob Zaghawa while the Baggara, Tibu, and Abbala Rizeigat (Bedouin) occupied the other side of the Arab divide. The negroid people were primarily agrarian and *ipso facto*, sedentary while the Arab on the other hand, were basically pastoralists and itinerant merchants.¹⁹ Racial and occupational differentiations concomitantly, provided areas of friction between and among the Darfuris. For instance, pastoral corridors used by the Arabs through agricultural lands of the negroes snowballed into family and communal feuds. As vented out by Altijam, an Arab Dafuri, “for years our herds were looted by the Zurga militias, the Zaghawa tribe especially. It

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁶ Oluwadare Aguda, *Arabism and Pan-Arabism in Sudanese Politics*, p.179.

¹⁷ Andrew S. Natsios, *Sudan, South Sudan and Darfur* pp. 27-28.

¹⁸ Richard Cockett, *Sudan: Darfur and the Failure of an African State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 170.

¹⁹ P. M. Holt, *A Modern History of the Sudan*, pp. 35-48. See also Andrew S. Natsios, *Sudan, South Sudan and Darfur*, pp. 118-120.

was not safe on the roads for anyone. So when the government said fight, we were happy and many of us joined the Popular Defence Force".²⁰

As gleaned from the above, race relations in Darfur had primordially been a contentious issue. According to Oliver Cox in his book titled *Caste, Class. and Race*, race relations is basically a social interaction issue. It is the belief of people who are distinguished or who consider themselves distinct in social relations with other people, by their physical and other characteristics.²¹ In this wise, prejudice towards other racial or religious groups assume a collective dimension. It is divisive and essentially intolerant.²²

The deplorable state of racial relations in the Darfur region was ossified by deliberate and sustained “arabisation” of Sudanese culture, politics, administration and economy by successive governments in the country from independence in 1956. As a corollary of this policy, non-Arab areas became politically dominated and economically neglected. Resources and development were concentrated around Khartoum and the Blue Nile province leaving peripheral areas like Darfur and Southern Sudan largely underdeveloped.²³ These states of affairs, *inter alia*, presented the *raison d'être* for the seemingly “eternal” Arab- African dichotomy in the Sudanese Society.

From the middle of the 1960s and the 1970s, drought-induced famine sequel to long-drawn desertification of the Sahelian zone with far-reaching consequences, engulfed the area. For instance, it culminated in pandemic famine across the zone in the 1980s. Water became scarce and pasture land as well as arable land shrank in size and availability. This condition of affairs accordingly pitched sedentary agriculturists against pastoralists. It also precipitated much political discontents and social upheavals throughout The Sudan. It was touted as one of the reasons which caused the over-throw of then Sudanese president, El-Nimeri in 1985.²⁴

The Darfur region in particular, suffered untold hardship during the period given its increase in population from one million in 1950 to six and a half million in 2000.²⁵ Yet the Darfuris were mainly agrarian and sedentary. On the other hand, increased desertification exerted much pressure on the Arab pastoralist groups resident in Darfur and others from Mali, Niger, and Chad who sought for water and pasture for their herds.²⁶

²⁰ Nima el-Baghir, “What’s is in a Name?” in *BBC Focus on Africa*, October – December, Volume 15, Number 4, p. 28.

²¹ Oliver Cox, *Caste, Class and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), p. 402.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *The Vanguard*, Vol. 22 60199, Thursday, November 9, 2006, p.17.

²⁴ Andrew S. Natsios, *Sudan, South Sudan and Darfur*: p.118.

²⁵ *Ibid.* see also Richard Cockett, *Sudan: Darfur and the Failure of an African State*, p. 172.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.120.

As succinctly captured by General Ibrahim Suleiman, an African Darfuri, former Governor of North Darfur, State and later Minister of Defence, “the problem of Darfur is ignorance and land”. He goes on to emphasize that:

Under the Fur sultans, Darfur was divided into *hawakeer*, or tribal lands, a system even the British colonial administrators did not dispute, which allows Arab and non-Arab tribes to live in peaceful co-existence. But as populations grew and new pasture and resources became scarce, friction between the mainly Arab nomads and non-Arab farmers, those at the centre of the present day conflict, began.²⁷

The Arab population laid claim to ownership of the fertile land area with water leaving the arid and less fertile area for the African farmers. The clash left about 3,000 people dead.²⁸

On July 21, 2001, a group of African leaders from the Fur and Zaghawa ethnic groups met at Abu Gamra and swore on the Quran to defend themselves against government-backed militia in their villages in defiance of the Quranic prescription of “one brotherhood”.²⁹ As noted by Andrew S. Natsios “in Darfur everyone professed themselves Muslims but Arabs regarded themselves as the true heirs and guardians of the Prophet’s teachings and considered African tribe’s devotion to Islam sometimes inferior.”³⁰

At the incipient stage, the Darfur, “rebels” crystallized into two main groups namely, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM/A). The SLM, the larger of the two groups, was mainly associated with the Fur, Massaleit and the Zaghawan clan of Wogi. JEM, on the other hand, was principally made up of the Kobe clan of the Zaghawa.³¹ Both groups collectively accused the Sudanese government of oppressing peoples of non- Arab origin.

However, the genesis of the main Darfur conflict according to Julie Flint and Alex de Waal is traceable to July 21 2001.³² In February, 2002, the “rebels” began preparations for their military actions by attacking the army garrison in the Jabal Marrah region. In June of the same year, the onslaught was extended to the Police station at Golo. Tine, another garrison town on

²⁷ Nima el- Baghir, “What’s is in a Name?”, p. 28.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ The Quran (Beirut: Dar Al – Choura, 1980), Sura 20, Ayat 50. See also en.m.wikipedia.org. Accessed and retrieved on June 24, 2024.

³⁰ Andrew S. Natsios, *Sudan, South Sudan and Darfur*, p.121.

³¹ For this crystallization, see I. D. F and Munzoul Assal, “The National Congress Party and the Darfurian Armed Groups” in David R. Black and Paul D. Williams (eds.) *The International Politics of Mass Atrocities: The Case of Darfur* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 37-39.

³² Julie Flint and Alex de Waal, *A New History of a Long War*, cited in Charles Hauss, *International Conflict Resolution*, 2nd Edition (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Ltd., 2019), p. 191.

the Chadian border fell to the “rebels” on March 25, 2003 with the seizure of much ammunition.³³ The Sudanese Army, weakened and distraught as a result of the long drawn war against the Sudan People’s Liberation Army – a Southern Sudanese, army under John Garang,³⁴ was ill-disposed to contain the hit-and run guerrilla tactics of the “rebels”.

The main crisis erupted on February, 26 2003. At the early stages, devastating aerial bombardments could not deter the resolve of the “rebels”. For instance, on April 25, 2003, the combined forces of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equity Movement (JEM), raided yet another Sudanese army garrison at al-Fashir in thirty-three land cruisers. The lives of 75 soldiers, pilots and technicians were wasted; 32 soldiers were captured, together with the commanding officer of the air base, Major General Ibrahim Bushra, Commander of the Sudanese Air Force. Whereas the “rebels” claimed that they had destroyed 7 Antonov bombers and helicopters gunships, the Sudanese government claimed 4 in number.

In May, 2003 the Sudan Liberation Army – the military wing of the Sudanese Liberation Movement – attacked Katum and destroyed a complete battalion. In the raid, 500 soldiers were killed and 300 captured as prisoners of war. In July, Tine was attacked again and 250 soldiers were killed. The “rebels” advanced eastwards and threatened to take Kordofan province. Up to August, 2003, they won 34 out of 38 engagements against the Sudanese army.³⁵

The Sudanese Government Response to the Crisis

The initial successes of the “rebels” forces were quite humiliating and demoralizing to the Sudanese soldiers. Sabotage by soldiers of Darfuran extraction in the Sudanese army, was suspected. The government became hamstrung and the appropriateness of military intelligence and tactics were called to question. More so, the protracted civil war against the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) of Southern Sudan had not only left the Sudanese military weary but had also dampened its morale. The military was equally trying to contain Eritrean-backed rebellion by the “Free Lions” of Rashaïda ethnic group, as well as that of the “Beja Congress” by the Beja, all in eastern Sudan.³⁶ Against these backdrops, the Sudanese army adopted a counter-insurgency tactics of pitching the nomadic Arab herdsmen of Baggara extraction, known as the *Janjaweed*, against the non- Arab population early in 2004.

As maintained by Nima el- Baghir,

³³ en.m.wikipedia.org Accessed and retrieved on June, 24, 2024

³⁴ Ishbel Matheson, “The Battleground” in *BBC Focus on Africa*, October- December, 2002, pp. 26-27. See also Gray Phombeah, “State of Disunity” in *Ibid*, pp. 28-29.

³⁵ en.m.wikipedia.org Accessed and retrieved on June 24, 2024. See also Andrew S. Natsios, *Sudan, South Sudan and Darfur*, p. 138-139.

³⁶ J. M. Seymour “The Regional Politics of the Darfur Crisis” in David R. Black and Paul D. Williams (eds.). *The International Politics of Mass Atrocities*, pp. 56-59. See also Andrew S. Natsios, *Sudan, South Sudan and Darfur*, p.144.

In Darfur, *Janjaweed* is a word that means everything and nothing. It is a composite word deriving literally from *Jinn* – which in Arabic means devils or spirits carrying G-3 rifles on a *Jowad* (horse). To the refugees and displaced, armed bandits on horse-back have always been *Janjaweed*. So when the night raids on their villages began, they naturally referred to their attackers on horseback as *Janjaweed*.³⁷

With supplies of ammunition, communication equipment and at times, uniforms by the government, the *Janjaweed* unleashed mayhem on non-Arab civilian population in the Darfur region. The *Janjaweed* were routinely accused of carrying out “ethnic cleansing”. The United States government described it as “genocide” and the United Nations similarly branded the Darfur crisis as a “humanitarian catastrophe.”

Murder of men, women, and children in cold blood as well as wanton rape of women by government soldiers, were reported. In many instances, scores of non-Arab villages were rendered desolate by the *Janjaweed* while Arab settlements were left essentially untouched. The Sudanese government routinely denied any involvement with the *Janjaweed*. But Musa Hilal, a *Janjaweed* leader, was reported to have instructed his aides, that “You are informed that directives have been issued to change the geography of Darfur and empty it of African tribes”³⁸

To be sure, these directives came from the government who funded the *Janjaweed* and provided them with gun-mounted Toyota Land Cruisers with air supports to carry out raids in the region. Again, a former Sudanese soldier who later defected confessed they were instructed by the government that: “If you see village, you burn that village. If you find a civilian you kill that civilian. If you see a cow, that cow is yours”.³⁹

The International Dimensions of the Darfur Crisis

On account of geography and alliances, the Darfur crisis became international in configuration. Western Darfur shares a common boundary with eastern Chad. Both countries have a similar ethnic makeup along the border and dislocations in the Sudan naturally reverberated onto the Republic of Chad too. By the middle of April, 2004, over 100, 000 refugees, in flight from the *Janjaweed* onslaught spewed into Chad, and concomitantly, Chadian government forces clashed with the *Janjaweed*.⁴⁰ Several *Janjaweed* militiamen were killed in the encounter while the Chadian army recorded 10 causalities.⁴¹ Idriss Déby Itno, the Chadian

³⁷ Nina el- Baghir, “What’s in a Name?”, p. 28.

³⁸ Juile Flint and Alex de Waal, *Darfur: A New History of a Long War*, p. 193.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁴⁰ en.m.wikipedia.org. Accessed and retrieved on June 20, 2024.

⁴¹ *The Vanguard*, Vol. 22, No. 60199, Thursday November 9, 2007.

President, a Zaghawan, accused the Sudan of exporting the “genocide” in Darfur across the border as well as attempting to “Arabise” the whole region.⁴² The Union of Forces for Democracy and Development (UFDD) – a Chadian rebel group, fighting for the ouster of Idriss Déby was reckoned to have rear bases in Darfur, with strong backing from the Sudanese government.⁴³

Omar al-Bashir, the Sudanese president conversely accused Idriss Déby Itno of attempting to create a “Greater Zaghawaland” on both sides of the Chadian – Sudanese border.⁴⁴ Similarly, Central African Republic’s north eastern flank is bordered by the south-western fringe of Darfur region. In the heat of the crisis, François Bozizé, then president of Central African Republic, accused the Sudan of arming the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR) led by Justin Hassane, the former bodyguard of his predecessor, Ange-Félix Patassé, whom he ousted from power in 2003.⁴⁵ Bangui consistently blamed Khartoum of using the Darfur crisis as a smokescreen for the dismemberment of Central African Republic.

The South-eastern tip of Libya is bordered by the North-western tip of the Darfur region. From the 1970s, the late Libyan President, Colonel Muammar Ghaddafi, was working towards the creation and promotion of pan-Arabism across the Sahelian zone of Africa. In concomitance with his resolve, attempts to involve United Nations peacekeepers in Darfur were rebuffed by Ghaddafi, branding them as a “colonizing force” at the African Union’s 5th Summit on Sudan in Tripoli.⁴⁶

Furthermore, Sino-Sudanese economic relations further compounded the crisis in Darfur. China was not only the biggest buyer of Sudanese crude oil, she was also Sudan’s biggest investor through Petrochina. China bought about 60% of Sudanese oil steadily. The Chinese President, Hu Jintao’s visit to Sudan was focused “more on growing economic links than on bringing peace to Western Sudan.”⁴⁷

China continually invoked its power of veto at the United Nations Security Council to block sanctions against the Sudan. Ammunitions used by the *Janjaweed* militiamen were of Sino manufacture. As noted by Brussels’ – based International Crisis Group, Beijing had “a vested interest in the continuation of a low level of insecurity; it keeps the other major investor

⁴² Andrew Manley, “Kicking out Déby” in *BBC Focus on Africa*, April – June, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2006, p. 20.

⁴³ Andrew Manley and Stephanie Hancock “Shades of Rwanda” *BBC Focus of Africa*, January – March, vol. 18 No. 1 2007, p.30.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *The Vanguard*, Vol. 22, No. 60269, Thursday November 23, 2006, p.17.

⁴⁷ Andrew S. Natsios, *Sudan, South Sudan and Darfur*, pp. 122-126.

out.”⁴⁸ Thus through a combination of economic and subtle diplomacy, China protractedly fueled the Darfur crisis.

On the 8th of April, 2004, a ceasefire agreement was brokered at the instance of the United Nations with Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary- General superintending. The agreement was signed in N'Djamena, Chad between the warring factions made up of the Sudanese government and two rebel groups namely, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) with Idriss Déby Itno, the Chadian President as the principal witness.⁴⁹ Surprisingly, the agreement came soonest after Jan Egeland, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Human Affairs and the Emergency Relief Coordinator had declared that the Sudanese Government in concert with the *Janjaweed* had deployed a “scorched-earth” campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Fur, Zaghawa and Massalit black (Zurga) groups principally.⁵⁰

Similarly, Collin Powell, US Defense Chief of Staff testified to the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee that “genocide has been committed in Darfur and that the Government of Sudan and the *Jingawein* bear responsibility.”⁵¹

At the instance of the African Union, a Ceasefire Commission was constituted under the aegis of the African Mission in Sudan (AMIS) to monitor the supposed truce. The African Union maintained a ragtag and poorly funded force with no clear-cut mandate to protect the civilians.

To be sure, the ceasefire agreement suffered a still birth as situations deteriorated following the resumption of hostilities especially by the government-backed *Janjaweed* which SLM/A and JEM responded promptly. In spite of clear warning by Kofi Annan, a Ghanaian by birth, that the “risk of genocide was frighteningly real in Darfur”, the United Nations stopped short of taking effective actions and described the crisis only in humanitarian assistance terms.

On May 5, 2006, another effort was made to stop the hostilities which raged on between the warring factions in Darfur. The effort which epitomized in the Abuja Agreement or Abuja Peace Accord was convened at the instance of Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria’s president. However, the Accord was facilitated by the United States Deputy Secretary of State, Robert B. Zoellick and orchestrated by African Union’s representatives led by Salim Ahmed Salim, officials from the European Union, the Arab League, and the United States of America all

⁴⁸ Opheera Mcdoon, “China’s Hu Visit Sudan, Presses on Darfur” August 9, 2007 in www. Reuteress.com accessed and retrieved on July 24, 2024.

⁴⁹ Sudantribune.com accessed and retrieved on July 14, 2024

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Paul D. Williams and David R. Black, “International Society and the Crisis in Darfur” in David R. Black and Paul D. Williams (eds.), *The International Politics of Mass Atrocities: The Case of Darfur* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), p. 9.

witnessed the signing processes between Omar al-Bashir, the Sudanese president and Minni Minnawi – led faction of the SLM/A.⁵²

In spite of boycott by JEM and a rival faction of SLM/A led by Abdul Wahid al Nur, the Agreement was seen as a potential milestone. It called for the disarming of the *Janjaweed* militia by the Sudanese government in August, 2006, cessation of hostilities, the disbanding and subsequent incorporation of the “rebel” forces into the national army and the police force. The Popular Defence Forces (PDF) which accommodated the *Janjaweed* was to be pruned down in number; and a democratization process in Darfur region was to be put in place to determine the political status of the region, terminating in a referendum in 2010.⁵³

But between June and August, 2006, the situation in Darfur plummeted to such a level that the United Nations Commission on Human Rights Special Investigator raised an alarm and Koffi Annan, the UN Secretary- General highlighted the need to replace the African Union Force (AMIS) with a hybrid troop of 20,000 men of the United Nations and the African Union. In reaction, the Sudanese government through her foreign minister, Lam Akol completely rejected an idea of a United Nations force in Darfur. Giving a bite to this rejection, the Sudanese president, al-Bashir intransigently declared in late 2006 that “Blue Helmets (UN PKO troops) will never step foot in Darfur.”⁵⁴

In a rather pre-emptive move, al-Bashir mobilized about 10,000 troops preparatory to “defending” Darfur in an event of the deployment of United Nations peacekeepers in the region. However, when confronted by the audacity of an impending international sanctions led by George Bush’s United States, Sudan’s intransigence crumbled like a pack of cards, and the country acceded to a hybrid peacekeeping force. As noted by Andrew Natsios, the Darfur imbroglio accordingly inaugurated the, “deployment of 26,000 United Nations/African Union (UN/AU) peacekeeping troops and police- the largest in UN history to a single conflict – to Darfur, which cost \$ 2 billion to main in 2007 alone.”⁵⁵

Meanwhile, attempts by the international community to bring about restraints to the destruction of Darfuri communities and wanton killings through the instrumentality of the International Criminal Court (ICC) were met by the stiff recalcitrance of the Sudanese government. For Instance, ICC investigators were barred from entering The Sudan. Instead, a “special court” was set up by the Sudanese government in Darfur, apparently to undermine the ICC and divest it of jurisdiction. It would be noted that the Rome Treaty forbids the ICC based at The Hague from trying cases which are deemed to have been given “fair trials” in their home

⁵² en.m.wikipedia.org. Accessed and retrieved on July 14, 2024.

⁵³ See *Ibid* for more specifics of the agreement.

⁵⁴ Andrew S. Natsios, *Sudan, South Sudan and Darfur*; p.159.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

countries. Besides, Sudan was not an ICC state party⁵⁶ The implications of this state of affairs was that the *Janjaweed* militiamen were given official protection while aerial attacks by the government forces continued unabated.

The international community, notably the United Nations and other great powers such as Great Britain, France, Russia and so on, were blamed for lackadaisical attitude and response to the Darfur crisis. The minority group in particular criticized the international community heavily for being mere spectators to the replication of the Rwandan genocide in Darfur. On September 16, 2007, the “Fourth Day for Darfur” was celebrated as “International Global day for Darfur” chiefly by women across the globe calling for the UN to spotlight the Darfur crisis.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, on the same day in Darfur, the Sudanese government responded with air raids in the region. The “rebels” also responded by downing two government helicopter gunships. Ban Ki moon, the newly appointed UN Secretary-General was yet to grapple with the realities of the conflict, hence his initial inaction.

The point to note also is the fact that the Sudanese government relished in the support of China against its stance on the Darfur imbroglio. China’s neck-deep involvement in Sudan’s oil exploration after the exit of Chevron accounted for the vitriolic support Sudan got from China in the face of international sanctions. China’s National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) had the largest percentage share in Sudanese oil while Sudapet, Sudanese government’s state owned oil company, had only 5% in Sudanese oil in 2003.⁵⁸ Sino-Sudanese economic comradeship therefore became taut and in appreciation of their relationship, the Sudanese president mused thus:

Our relationship with China is built upon mutual benefit. China has always supported the unity of Sudan. When our relationships became problematic with the international financial institutions, we turned to China. Relations with China have enabled us to overcome economic difficulties.⁵⁹

In concord with the Sudanese position, the Chinese government defended its overt support to the Sudanese government by maintaining that the situation in Darfur, worsened since some western countries are eager to “internationalise” what had been pure (sic) internal affair of Sudan.... The Darfur issue wouldn’t

⁵⁶ The Sudan was not a signatory to ICC membership as was argued by the Sudanese Government.

⁵⁷ en.m.wikipedia.org. accessed and retrieved on July 17, 2024

⁵⁸ Richard Cockett, *Sudan: Darfur and the Failure of an African State*, p.55.

⁵⁹ Ian Taylor, “The People’s Republic of China” in David R. Black and Paul D. Williams (eds.) *The International Politics of Mass Atrocities*, p.178.

have escalated so fast... without intervention from external powers driven by their own interest.⁶⁰

In point of fact, international politics significantly played out in Darfur. Chinese strike aircrafts and Russian helicopter gunships" were freely used during the crisis and China was a major supplier of arms and ammunition to the Sudanese government during this period. Again, China, in concert with Russia and Qatar consistently blocked, through abstention, United Nations resolutions aimed at curtailing the deleterious onslaught of Sudanese government's atrocities on Darfuri communities.⁶¹

In any event, conditions of mutual hostilities continued between the warring divides until February 22, 2010 when another peace deal was signed between the Sudanese government and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) for cessation of hostilities at Doha, Qatar. Among other provisions, the peace agreement had the prospects of prisoners' exchange, permanent ceasefire and the prospect of granting a semi-autonomous status to Darfur.⁶²

Consequences of the Crisis

Between 2003 and 2010, the Darfur crisis witnessed manifold consequences. To be sure, untold hardship and dislocations were unleashed on the Darfuris as a result of the sack of various communities through aerial bombardment by the Sudanese air force, wanton killings and burning of several towns and villages sequel to the deployment of scorched- earth tactics by the *Janjaweed* who also raped women profusely.

The counter-insurgency tactics of the Sudanese government against Darfur "rebels" were quite ferocious, clinical and followed a "regular pattern." As pointed out by Richard Crocket,

these tactics quickly descended into what was effectively ethnic cleansing, as whole populations were cleared from their villages and concentrated into policed refugee camps. Moreover, judging by the tactics and weapons that the Sudanese government used in Darfur, it was clear that they willed this outcome from the very beginning. For the so-called counter-insurgency operation focused from the outset on the indiscriminate clearing of civilian areas, rather than specific attacks on rebel soldiers and camps⁶³

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp.181-182.

⁶² Richard Crockett, Sudan: *Darfur and the Failure of an African State*, p. 186.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

Mortar shells, which weighed 250 pounds and five feet tall in height, rocket-propelled grenades and small round ammunitions with Chinese and Russian brandings, were freely used.⁶⁴ The number of death people hovered around 300,000 civilians.⁶⁵ About 2.7 million people were displaced and some of them fled into neighbouring countries of Chad, Central African Republic and present-day South Sudan where they were congregated into refugee camps with dire conditions. The Darfur crisis further compounded the political equation in The Sudan. The Sudanese government regarded the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) as “nothing more than a vehicle for the political ambitions of the endlessly scheming Hassan al-Turabi who aimed at coming back to power in Khartoum and taking his “revenge” against President al-Bashir.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, al-Bashir was also contending against the long drawn war against South Sudan-based Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) led by John Garang and later, Salva Kiir.⁶⁷

On the flip side, Darfuri “rebels” inflicted destruction and seizure of government garrison towns such as Tine, Al-Fashir, Kutum and so on; seized ammunitions from government forces; killed many Sudanese soldiers including top ranking officers, destroyed government war planes, helicopter gun-ships and tanks.

Through administrative control, the Sudanese government at several times monitored, restricted and frustrated several international aid agencies from rendering humanitarian services in the war-ravaged region of Darfur despite routinely pledging “free access” to them. In January 2006, for instance, a good number of such organisations were deprived of access to Darfur region. Their applications for access into the area were attended to with manifold administrative bottle necks. On April 3, 2006, the Norwegian Refugee Council, apparently the largest humanitarian agency which “managed and coordinated the largest internally displaced camp” with about 100,000 people at Kalma in South Darfur was expelled from the country for no plausible reason.⁶⁸

All told, conditions in Darfur vacillated between endless signing of agreements by several divides of the warring parties and dire political, economic and social conditions in the region upto 2010.

⁶⁴ en.m.wikipedia.org. Accessed and retrieved on July 17, 2024

⁶⁵ Richard Crockett, *Sudan: Darfur and the Failure of an African State*, p. 181.

⁶⁶ Gray Phombeah, “State of Disunity” in *BBC Focus on Africa*, Vol. 13, No. 4, October – December, 2002, pp. 28-29.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶⁸ www.hrw.org accessed and retrieved on

Conclusion

This paper has traced and also highlighted the undercurrents which gave impetus to the eruption of Darfur crisis from 2003 to 2010. The conflict was majorly between the Sudanese government-backed Arab militias, the *Jangaweed* and the negroid Darfuris such as the Zaghawa, Masslaeit, Dagu and Meidob who were banded together in Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A).

The crisis had such undertones which dated back to several years of peripheralisation and marginalization of the Darfur region; systematic and sustained “Arabisation” of the demography of the region by Arab- controlled central government in Khartoum; increasing desertification of the Sahelian zone within which Darfur region is located, with far-reaching impact on pasturelands and water resources; as well as the intransigence of the Sudanese government to heed to the entreaties of a few members of the international community to better the lot of the region.

The Sudanese president, Omar Hassan Ahmad al- Bashir, superintended the official onslaught against the Darfuris with the vitriolic support of China and Russia, who were investors in Sudanese oil and other economic engagements. They were also the major suppliers of arms and ammunitions to the Sudanese government soldiers deployed to contain the “rebels” and their insurrection and sporadic onslaught on military positions in Darfur region.

Throughout the periodization covered in this paper, the Darfur region witnessed much economic dislocation, untold hardship and social ferment at the instance of Sudanese government and the glaring inaction of the international community.

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