

Saving Darfur

Seductive Analogies and the Limits of Airpower Coercion in Sudan

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BY ANY measure, the humanitarian crisis in Darfur is a tragedy. In 2003 an unexpected rebellion in the remote states of Darfur drove the Sudanese government in Khartoum to initiate a brutal counterinsurgency campaign destroying thousands of villages and killing hundreds of thousands of Darfuris, many of them women and children.¹ In a region of over 6 million people, nearly 2.7 million Darfuris remain “internally displaced persons” with an additional quarter of a million eking out their existence in refugee camps across the border in Chad.² Thousands of humanitarian workers risk hijacking, abduction, and attack from armed assailants to care for and feed those affected by the conflict.³

Although the level of violence has declined drastically since 2004, attacks on villages in Darfur by *janjaweed* militia and government forces continue. Campaigns in the region have been especially brutal, with the government using helicopter gunships and Antonov cargo aircraft to terrorize civilians with bullets and “barrel bombs” filled with explosives and metal shards.⁴ The atrocities and tactics of the government of Sudan have received significant attention from the media, humanitarian organizations, and a plethora of Hollywood celebrities, yet the international community remains focused on diplomacy rather than decisive actions.⁵ Many of the community leaders in al-Fashir, the capital of Northern Darfur, have shaken the hands of more than a dozen heads of state, yet the United Nations (UN) struggles to provide half of the 26,000 authorized peacekeepers for the embattled region.⁶

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Figure 1. Sudan. (Reprinted from <http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/sudan.pdf>.)

Unilateral sanctions and engaged diplomacy were the primary methods used by the Bush administration to confront Sudan's president Omar Hassan al-Bashir, but America's involvement may escalate due to the election of Pres. Barack Obama. Like Pres. George W. Bush before him, President Obama has called the actions of the Sudanese government in Darfur "genocide" but added that the United States should set up a "no-fly zone" over the area.⁷ Members of the former Clinton administration and foreign policy advisors for the Obama campaign have also compared the intransigence of al-Bashir to the actions of former Yugoslavian president Slobodan Milosevic. In 2006 Susan Rice (the current US ambassador to the UN) argued that al-Bashir's refusal to accept UN peacekeepers called for the destruction of the Sudanese air force and likened the proposed air campaign to the 1999 victory in Kosovo.⁸ A coalition of NATO countries did establish no-fly zones and conduct air strikes for humanitarian operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, but are those conflicts helpful analogies for the current situation in Darfur? How should the air campaigns in the former Yugoslav republics guide the new administration's strategy in Darfur? Wars, specifically the most recent wars, have traditionally dominated the minds of political leaders.⁹ The purpose of this analysis is to examine America's most recent humanitarian interventions where no-fly zones facilitated peacekeeping operations and to explore how they could shape courses of action, theories of success, and potential policy options for Darfur.

After a brief introduction to the history of the Darfur crisis and the role of analogies, airpower, and coercion in humanitarian interventions, this article compares the presumptions, likenesses, and differences of the current conflict to three seductively similar humanitarian operations in the 1990s: Operation Provide Comfort in northern Iraq, Operation Deny Flight in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Operation Allied Force in Kosovo. Not unlike the atrocities initiated by Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic, the actions of al-Bashir from 2003 to 2004 are truly horrific. Unless there is an immense shift, however, in the nature of the Sudanese conflict and the overarching geopolitical landscape, a no-fly zone and air strikes are unlikely to provide the justice or response desired by the Obama administration. On the contrary, military actions under current conditions have the potential to drastically increase the level of human catastrophe in the region and implicate the United States in a conflict it will find difficult to escape.

The Darfur Crisis

Darfur's massive political, security, and humanitarian crisis is the complex product of armed factions from Chadian civil wars, the civil war between Arab Muslims in North Sudan and African Christians in South Sudan, and local conflicts over dwindling resources due to overpopulation and desertification. The flashpoint for the conflict occurred in April 2003 when an alliance of Islamic rebel movements and African tribes led coordinated attacks on an air base and other military outposts in Darfur. The rebels blew up government transport aircraft and helicopters, captured the base commander, and executed 200 Sudanese army prisoners despite their surrender.¹⁰ The timing of the attacks was deliberate and costly for the predominantly Arab Sudanese government, which was negotiating a power-sharing agreement with the liberation movement in South Sudan after two decades of civil war. The African movement in Darfur hoped to gain its fair share of national wealth and security after decades of cyclical drought, years of neglect from the central government, and violent encroachment of farmland by former Chadian rebels and Arab herders.¹¹ The government did not anticipate the threat from its poor Western relatives, and the repression of the uprising was brutal and swift. Al-Bashir's regime could not rely on the Sudanese army to crush the insurrection because most of the recruits and noncommissioned officers were from Darfur.¹² Instead, the government made a deal with armed bands and Arab tribes in the region. The camel-herding tribes could pursue their territorial ambitions in Darfur in return for suppressing the rebellion.¹³ What followed was an ethnic-cleansing campaign or "counterinsurgency on the cheap."¹⁴ From 2003 to 2004, *janjaweed* militia routinely surrounded and burned rebel villages after Sudanese aircraft had bombed and strafed the inhabitants. In the process of clearing villages, militiamen often raped girls and women, killed livestock, and tossed small children back into burning houses.¹⁵

Nongovernmental organizations (NGO) and the international community reacted with horror to the atrocities, but a response to the outbreak in violence was difficult to coordinate. Many feared the conflict could derail peace negotiations for the civil war in the South, which had killed over two million people over the previous two decades.¹⁶ The United States and NATO countries could not commit the large number of troops or accept the casualties and commitment necessary for a ground operation in Darfur because of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, so the international community pursued a wide range of diplomatic initiatives targeting al-Bashir's regime

from 2004 to 2007.¹⁷ Major efforts included improving the access of humanitarian organizations, orchestrating the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between North and South Sudan, negotiating the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement between the government and rebel factions, seeking the prosecution of leaders for war crimes in the International Criminal Court (ICC), and deploying underequipped, outnumbered African Union (AU) and United Nations peacekeeping forces.¹⁸ Executing a clear and coherent strategy in Darfur was difficult given the sheer size of the region, scope of the conflict, and the multiplicity of actors and objectives.

Similarities of the Darfur Crisis with Dominant Analogies

The conflict in Darfur is a problem that regional experts, policy makers, and humanitarian organizations have struggled with for years. Understanding and describing the underlying context of the crisis is difficult. Gérard Prunier, a prolific author, historian, and expert on East Africa, warns readers in his book on Darfur that “*everything* does not *make sense*.”¹⁹ As President Obama begins to shift his focus from domestic to international issues, his administration will attempt to make sense of the situation in Darfur. Public comments from his foreign-policy advisors suggest that his administration will use historical analogies to facilitate analysis of the conflict and to advocate forceful action.²⁰

Unfortunately, there are identifiable and systematic biases in the use of historical analogies.²¹ In many cases, decision makers fail to analyze key presumptions behind historical analogies and are predisposed to “plunge toward action” and advocate misguided policies that administrations could have avoided with closer inspection.²² Operations Provide Comfort, Deny Flight, and Allied Force are irresistible and dangerous analogies for the Darfur crisis because the conflicts have many similarities, some of which are inherent to humanitarian interventions. The campaigns in northern Iraq, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo addressed grievances common to many intrastate conflicts in the 1990s: the rebellion of marginalized peoples denied their share of political power and wealth of the state. They also featured incompetent governments that used racial or ethnic divisions to divide and suppress the rebellion, with the United States and its allies using airpower and military force to confront the suppressors.²³ In 1997 the Clinton administration called this type of humanitarian intervention

“complex contingency operations” and specifically distinguished the campaigns in Bosnia and northern Iraq from other low-level military actions like hostage rescues, counterterrorism missions, or interventions due to natural disasters.²⁴

Common Coercive Challenges

Coercion was a major component of these “complex contingency operations,” yet the characteristics of humanitarian interventions made coercion difficult.²⁵ Coercion is the use of force, either threatened or actual, “to induce an adversary to change its behavior.”²⁶ Coercion was necessary in northern Iraq and the Balkans to deter belligerents from disrupting aid organizations and to compel the oppressive governments to remove underlying causes of the conflict. To be successful, the enforcement of a no-fly zone in Darfur would have to overcome three common challenges of executing a coercion strategy during humanitarian operations: low strategic interest, competing coalition objectives, and nonstate actors.

Low Strategic Interest. One of the major challenges for a military intervention in Darfur is that the United States has little or no strategic interest in the region, which could result in tentative domestic support for a prospective military campaign. Sudan is no longer a terrorist threat. The government of Sudan once welcomed Osama bin Laden to its country, but since the 9/11 attacks, the regime has cooperated with intelligence agencies and supported US counterterrorism efforts.²⁷ US interests in Darfur are predominantly humanitarian, and an intervention in Sudan must overcome the stigma of America’s experience of another humanitarian operation in Somalia. That intervention killed 18 service members, compelled the administration to remove US forces from the country in six months, and affected the administration’s calculus of subsequent interventions in the Balkans.²⁸ Obtaining broad public support for an intervention in Darfur will be difficult because of the lack of strategic interests in the region and the potentially high political cost of military operations in Africa.

Competing Coalition Objectives. If the United States is to intervene militarily in Darfur, it will most likely participate as a member of a coalition to provide the legitimacy, ground troops, and donors necessary for military action and humanitarian support. While the participants in the operations in northern Iraq and the Balkans were primarily from NATO countries, the UN peacekeeping forces in Darfur consist of soldiers provided by member states of the African Union and combat engineers from

China.²⁹ The overextension of the US military in Iraq and Afghanistan increases the imperative to obtain broad international support for additional operations in Darfur. The United States will have to manage the competing interests and objectives of potential donor countries if the campaign is to be as effective as Operation Provide Comfort and the NATO campaigns in the Balkans.

Nonstate Actors. The nature of the belligerents was also a major factor in the Balkan conflicts and is especially important in Darfur. Many of the perpetrators in intrastate conflicts are nonstate actors and have loose connections with governments that may or may not sanction their tactics. Due to the disintegration of the Yugoslav army, Milosevic's regime and political leaders recruited gang members, soccer hooligans, and criminals to help government forces ethnically cleanse Balkan communities.³⁰ In Darfur, *janjaweed* militias provide a similar service. The word *janjaweed* originated in the 1960s as a pejorative term used to describe poor vagrants from Arab tribes.³¹ Now it describes a makeshift organization of more than six different armed groups that receive support from Sudan's military intelligence agency. Few agree on the precise makeup of the *janjaweed*, and the organization is difficult to locate and identify, especially from the air in an area the size of France. Limits on the use of force during humanitarian operations combined with lax ties between the central government and perpetrators make coercion difficult, even when the culprits are easy to find.

Common Coercive Mechanisms

An effective strategy in humanitarian operations requires coercive mechanisms or processes by which threats generate concessions from the adversary.³² Common mechanisms include eroding the powerbase of the targeted government, creating unrest within the population, decapitating leaders of the regime, weakening the strength of the country as a whole, and denying adversaries the ability to accomplish their objectives. The challenges of humanitarian operations invalidate many of these options, however. The campaigns in the Balkans and northern Iraq successfully used two: denial and powerbase erosion. Both mechanisms could play a large role in the enforcement of a no-fly zone in Sudan.

Denial. Nullifying an opponent's strategy by reducing its ability to accomplish its objectives is denial. Some denial strategies "thwart the enemy's military strategy for taking and holding its territorial objectives, compelling

concessions to avoid futile expenditure of further resources.”³³ This was the case for Operation Deny Flight, which tried to deny Bosnian Serbs the ability to terrorize and conquer Bosnian Muslim and Croatian villages during the Bosnian war. After Bosnian Muslims and Croats voted to secede from the Yugoslavian Federation in 1992, Bosnian Serb irregulars attacked Bosnian Muslim and Croat villages with air support from the Yugoslavian air force.³⁴ The Bosnian Serbs hoped to force Muslim and Croat civilians out of Serb-controlled territory and establish a Serbian Republic of Bosnia. Operation Deny Flight established a no-fly zone over the battlefield to prevent the Bosnian Serbs from using their ground-attack fighters and helicopter gunships to support their ethnic cleansing campaign. Sudan also has fighters, bombers, and helicopter gunships, and as late as May 2008, the Sudanese government used an Antonov medium bomber to strike a village in North Darfur.³⁵ A robust no-fly zone over Darfur could prevent such attacks and enforce a 2005 UN Security Council resolution forbidding “offensive military flights in and over the Darfur region.”³⁶

Powerbase Erosion. The other common mechanism used by the United States and its allies in northern Iraq and the Balkans is powerbase erosion. This mechanism attempts to undercut the control and leadership of a regime by attacking the political elites and cliques that support it.³⁷ During Operation Provide Comfort, Saddam Hussein was extremely sensitive to air strikes against high-value targets in Baghdad, and the coalition maintained a squadron of long-range attack aircraft in Turkey to act as a credible threat to his regime.³⁸ In Operation Allied Force, NATO attacked military-related industries, utilities, and other targets in Belgrade to foster elite discontent and erode popular support of Milosevic. Some argue that mounting pressure from political elites, civilian oligarchy, and army leadership contributed to Milosevic’s yielding to NATO demands.³⁹ Obama’s advisors suggest similar threats could coerce Sudan’s leadership and that the “credible threat or use of force” is the “one language Khartoum understands.”⁴⁰

Common Coercive Instruments

The United States has numerous tools at its disposal to trigger coercive mechanisms and to begin the process by which threats generate adversary concessions. Examples include air strikes, invasion, nuclear retaliation, economic sanctions, political isolation, and insurgency support.⁴¹ The high cost of many of these instruments makes them unsuitable for

humanitarian operations, however. The strategies for Operations Provide Comfort, Deny Flight, and Allied Force relied primarily on three: airpower, economic sanctions, and political isolation.

Airpower. No-fly zones and air strikes are common military instruments for US humanitarian operations because of their flexibility and relatively low cost. As Eliot Cohen remarked, "Air power is an unusually seductive form of military strength, in part because, like modern courtship, it appears to offer gratification without commitment."⁴² US air strikes, including the northern Iraq and Balkans conflicts, rarely result in friendly casualties. The air campaign for Operation Allied Force lasted 78 days with zero battlefield casualties. Airpower can also contribute to denial and powerbase-reduction strategies and has the ability to expand or contract the level of destruction to suit the needs of the coercer. Because airpower is cheap, flexible, and seemingly successful, air strikes have become a standard form of intimidation for the United States. Former Clinton advisors Susan Rice and Anthony Lake cite the administration's 1998 cruise missile strike in Khartoum as a primary reason why al-Bashir's regime cooperates with the United States on counterterrorism.⁴³ Airpower is a seductive component of many analogies for the Darfur crisis because of perceptions that it is effective and easy to use.

Economic Sanctions and Political Isolation. Coalition air forces in northern Iraq and the Balkans did not operate in isolation from other coercive instruments. Sanctions and diplomatic measures reinforced air threats by imposing costs and denying benefits for the regimes of Saddam and Milosevic. A comprehensive economic embargo of Iraq and an international coalition of countries that included Arab nations completely isolated Saddam during Operation Provide Comfort.⁴⁴ The UN passed a series of economic sanctions against Bosnia and Serbia during the Balkan conflicts, and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia indicted high-level Bosnian Serbs and Milosevic during the respective air campaigns in Bosnia and Kosovo.⁴⁵

If applied for Darfur, airpower in Sudan will also operate within the context of economic sanctions and indictments by the International Criminal Court. In 1993, the United States designated Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism, which subjects the country to restrictions on foreign assistance. UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1556 and 1591 prohibit the transfer of arms to the government of Sudan in Darfur as well as to rebels in the area.⁴⁶ UNSCR 1672 targets sanctions against four individuals:

two rebel leaders and two representatives of the Sudanese government.⁴⁷ In 2007, President Bush expanded the 1997 sanctions imposed by the Clinton administration. Both regimes applied unilateral restrictions on imports and exports, restricted financial transactions to and from Sudan, and froze assets of the Sudanese government. The ICC also indicted several mid-level antagonists in the conflict for genocide and recently issued a warrant for al-Bashir's arrest for war crimes and crimes against humanity.⁴⁸ Any military action in the Darfur crisis will have to operate in conjunction with a myriad of economic and diplomatic measures attempting to coerce the government of Sudan.

Differences of the Darfur Crisis from Dominant Analogies

The surface similarities between Operation Provide Comfort, the Balkan conflicts, and Darfur suggest possible airpower solutions to the crisis, prospects for success, and anticipated challenges. However, "more often than not, decision-makers invoke inappropriate analogues that not only fail to illuminate the new situation but also mislead by emphasizing superficial and irrelevant parallels."⁴⁹ The remainder of this article anticipates irrelevant parallels between the analogous conflicts and the Darfur crisis and examines key presumptions that sustain them. Figure 2 (p. 91) summarizes the findings.

Operation Provide Comfort

Operation Provide Comfort was one of the most successful humanitarian operations in history. After the Iraq War, a Kurdish uprising and subsequent government repression drove over 400,000 refugees into the mountains along the Turkish-Iraqi border.⁵⁰ In response, coalition forces successfully defended the Kurdish refugees from Iraqi forces, aided their return to a safe zone in northern Iraq, and airlifted massive amounts of humanitarian supplies to the region. A key presumption emerges from the campaign: a similar operation could aid Darfuri refugees in Chad and "save Africans." The circumstances surrounding Operation Provide Comfort were exceptional, however, and the United States will find it difficult to recreate two conditions that made the return of Kurdish refugees in Iraq a success: a strong strategic interest to solve the refugee crisis and a demonstrated ability to apply force in the region.

Differences in International Interests. Unlike Darfur, the return of refugees to their homeland in Iraq was of vital interest to the United States and key allies. The Kurds are a large, disgruntled minority in Turkey, and an influx of hundreds of thousands of Kurdish refugees was a significant security threat. Turkey publicly invited the allies to intervene in the crisis and closed its borders, trapping the refugees in the mountains in the middle of winter.⁵¹ A month earlier, Pres. George H. W. Bush had urged the Iraqi people to “take matters in their own hands” and “force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside.”⁵² Material support of the subsequent rebellion by the United States was nonexistent, however, and the Iraqi military crushed Kurdish guerrillas with the help of helicopter gunships and fixed-wing fighter bombers flying in defiance of UNSCR 686.⁵³ The security needs of an important ally and media images of Kurdish suffering compelled the administration to respond with air-dropped supplies only seven days after the crisis began. Within weeks, coalition forces established a security zone in northern Iraq. Within seven weeks, the humanitarian operation completely repatriated the Kurds from the Turkish border region.⁵⁴

In contrast, the motivations for intervention in Darfur are almost completely humanitarian. The 250,000 refugees on the border with Chad are only a security threat for the region itself, and media coverage of the human suffering is light. Ninety-six percent of the deaths in the Darfur crisis occurred between 2003 and 2004, and news of the genocide almost disappeared after North and South Sudan signed the CPA in January 2005, ending 21 years of civil war.⁵⁵ There was an uptick in coverage prior to the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing and the 2008 presidential elections, but the most recent coverage focused on the impending indictment of al-Bashir by the ICC.⁵⁶ The population of refugee camps has stabilized, but the security associated with them remains an issue. Since January 2008, bandits and assailants have killed 11 humanitarian workers, abducted 170 staff members, and hijacked 225 vehicles in Darfur.⁵⁷ Despite the violence, major powers have not committed military resources to secure refugees and humanitarian personnel in the region. Perhaps the lackluster support of the one million Kurdish refugees who fled to Iran instead of Turkey is more revealing. Iran received just over half the total international assistance for Kurdish refugees despite its protection of a refugee population almost triple that of Turkey.⁵⁸

Differences in Credibility. One primary reason why Operation Provide Comfort was able to deter Saddam’s regime from disturbing the return of Kurdish refugees was because the United States and its allies credibly

demonstrated the “skill and will” to apply force.⁵⁹ The operation began only two months after Operation Desert Storm, which included a devastating air campaign that crippled Saddam’s forces. Many of the weapons, soldiers, and procedures were still in place to threaten the regime. Ground forces were also available to distribute supplies, provide security, and expand the safe zone for the eventual return of Kurdish refugees. The United States inserted 5,000 troops into the region, and the commander of the combined task force, LTG John Shalikashvili, met personally with Iraqi military representatives positioned along the border of northern Iraq to dictate the terms of the intervention and the scope of the safe zone.⁶⁰ A day after the meeting, Marines on the ground directed mock air strikes on Iraqi positions and compelled Iraqi forces to leave the area.⁶¹ NATO aircraft and 2,500 troops on alert in southeastern Turkey also provided a deterrent when UN agencies and NGOs assumed responsibility for delivering humanitarian aid.⁶² The weakness of the Iraqi military and the credible integration of air and ground forces by the United States and its allies against a conventional foe were critical to the success of Operation Provide Comfort.

The history of military intervention and coercion in Darfur does not include skill and resolve in the application of force, especially against the myriad of nonstate parties to the conflict. Twice the UN has authorized peacekeeping forces for the Darfur crisis. In June 2004, a UN Security Council resolution created the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS), a force of 7,500 soldiers and police from African nations tasked to monitor a verbal cease-fire agreement and to “provide a safe and secure environment for the return of internally displaced persons and refugees.”⁶³ Unfortunately, the mission’s mandate, rules of engagement, and numbers were completely inadequate to complete the task. Outgunned and underresourced, the mission could not even challenge rebel roadblocks as they tried to protect 34 refugee camps, some with over 120,000 inhabitants, in an area the size of France. The UN approved a second “hybrid” peacekeeping force of 20,600 AU and UN forces in August 2006 to augment AMIS with greater numbers and a stronger mandate, but the group had difficulty protecting itself, let alone refugees.⁶⁴ In September 2007, AU forces ran out of ammunition as hundreds of rebels in trucks overran their base in eastern Darfur, seizing tons of supplies and heavy weapons.⁶⁵ For future military instruments to be successful in Darfur, they will have to overcome pessimism created by years of unwillingness by the international community to move beyond neutral peacekeeping and mediation in Sudan.

Operation Deny Flight

UN peacekeeping operations in Bosnia also suffered from a deficit in credibility, but the United States and NATO were able to overcome the impotence of Operation Deny Flight with Operation Deliberate Force. Beginning in the summer of 1992, Serb aggression and support of an ethnic cleansing campaign by Bosnian Serbs inspired the UN to impose comprehensive sanctions against Serbia, deploy UN peacekeepers, and task NATO to enforce a no-fly zone within Bosnian airspace.⁶⁶ The use of force, however, even in defense of UN peacekeepers, was “highly circumscribed” during Operation Deny Flight, and Bosnian Serbs took advantage of the UN’s indecisiveness to gain territory and terrorize the civilian populace.⁶⁷ The fall of Muslim safe area Srebrenica, use of UN hostages to deter NATO reprisals, and potential for a UN withdrawal from Bosnia prompted the United States to lead an escalated air campaign against the Bosnian Serbs from August to December 1995.⁶⁸ Covert supply of Bosnian Muslims and air strikes strategically timed with Bosnian Muslim and Croatian ground offensives shifted the balance of territory in the region. Territorial losses and the prospect for removal of sanctions compelled Milosevic to negotiate terms to end the conflict.⁶⁹ The indictment of Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic for war crimes also enabled a US envoy to isolate the Bosnian Serb “spoilers” from cease-fire talks, which helped Americans negotiate and employ the Dayton peace accords.⁷⁰

A key presumption that emerges from Operations Deny Flight and Deliberate Force is that timely air strikes and the indictment of war criminals can facilitate negotiations and the development of a viable cease-fire agreement. Two differences in the Darfur conflict make this generalization unlikely if the United States uses a similar strategy against the Sudanese government. For one, the Darfuris seek security guarantees and a greater share of national wealth, not independence from a greater Sudan. Second, a coercer must factor the related and potentially more destabilizing North-South conflict into any strategy for peace in Darfur.

Differences in Objectives. Independence was the objective of the parties in the Bosnian conflict. On 1 March 1992, a parliamentary majority of Muslim and Croatian delegates followed the lead of Slovenia and Croatia and voted for independence from Yugoslavia. Bosnian Serbs rejected the referendum and, dreading subjugation by Bosnian Muslims and Croats, executed their contingency plan for self-determination and seceded.⁷¹ The expansion of regional boundaries and control of territory became the

primary goal of the three belligerent groups. The United States and its allies successfully coerced the Bosnian Serbs into accepting the terms of the Dayton accords, because combined air and ground offensives denied them the ability to achieve their goal. The effects of economic sanctions and indictments by the International Criminal Tribunal also isolated the Bosnian Serbs from their primary source of military strength, Serbia, and compelled Milosevic to act as a third-party coercer.⁷² The objectives of independence and the control of territory were important aspects in the dynamics of coercion in the Bosnian war.

The objective of the Darfuris is not independence but physical protection, political access, and a greater share of national wealth. The rebellion is a reaction to the negligence of the Sudanese government, which failed to secure Darfuris from violent abuse by Arab tribes even before the government's tacit support of the *janjaweed*.⁷³ This negligence and "the hegemony of the northern and central elites to keep Darfur and other peripheral regions marginalized" form the core of Darfuri grievances.⁷⁴ Darfur, landlocked and overpopulated, has few natural resources and cannot survive as an independent country without significant help. Some argue the region is poorer today than it was in the late 1800s due to years of drought and overgrazing.⁷⁵ Ruling Arabs in North Sudan do not favor an independent Darfur because they need the predominantly Muslim population in the North to balance the Christian population in the South. The international community fears an independent Darfur because of the massive amount of aid and sponsorship it would require to sustain the region. Independence is not a viable option for major players in the Darfur conflict. Ultimately, the long-term survival of Darfuris depends on the cooperation and support of the Sudanese government, making it difficult to apply pressure to the ruling regime.

If the United States seeks to coerce al-Bashir's regime with airpower, the impending indictment of the Sudanese president for war crimes is also problematic.⁷⁶ The International Criminal Court's arrest warrant gives Sudan's president additional incentive to consolidate power and to resist demands that remotely threaten the stability of his regime. Since his indictment by the court, al-Bashir has expelled 13 aid organizations he accuses of abetting the international case against him.⁷⁷ The leader of Sudan's intelligence service recently called for the "amputation of the hands and the slitting of the throats" of Sudanese people who support the charges.⁷⁸ Al-Bashir's loss of control or his apprehension by a UN

operation could result in prosecution and humiliation at The Hague. The objective of al-Bashir is to remain in power, and the source of his power and influence—oil—is not susceptible to airpower.⁷⁹ In the case of Darfur, criminal indictment by the ICC conflicts with coercion strategies that seek concessions by al-Bashir and his government.

Differences in Priorities. Regional issues were certainly important factors in the negotiations to end the Bosnian war, but a resolution to the Bosnia conflict remained the priority of the United States and international community. Richard Holbrooke, the lead US negotiator at Dayton, was sympathetic to the plight of Albanians in Kosovo but believed addressing the topic was counterproductive to achieving a peace agreement.⁸⁰ Granted, Croatia's 1995 offensive in Krajina played a large role in America's strategy to end the Bosnian conflict. Territorial gains "strengthened Croatia as a strategic counterweight to Serbia" and helped NATO "forge a Croatian-Muslim alliance as a military counterweight to the Bosnian Serbs," but the United States directed its coercive efforts against Serbia for a resolution in Bosnia, not satellite conflicts in Croatia or Kosovo.⁸¹

In contrast, the Darfur conflict has historically been subordinate to the civil war in Sudan. In 2004, despite the violence and atrocities in Darfur, the policy of US, British, and Norwegian negotiators was to proceed with the CPA between North and South Sudan while the Darfur crisis remained unresolved.⁸² The 2005 agreement established a "confederal system" of two regional governments: one in North Sudan dominated by al-Bashir's National Congress Party and a semiautonomous government in South Sudan controlled by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement.⁸³ The agreement includes a timetable for multiparty elections in 2009 and a referendum on southern independence in 2011.⁸⁴ The agreement also requires an equal distribution of oil revenues from the North to the South, which controls the vast majority of oil-producing territory. Last year, skirmishes along the border and the suspension of oil-revenue payments almost sparked a full-scale war, but cooler heads prevailed.⁸⁵ Upsetting the military balance between North and South Sudan with an intervention in Darfur could result in a larger, more deadly civil war with even greater humanitarian repercussions. Perhaps an aspect of the Bosnian conflict that is more enlightening is how the Dayton peace process and perceptions of neglect by the Kosovo Albanians led to violence in Kosovo and Operation Allied Force.⁸⁶ Military solutions for the Darfur crisis risk reigniting the North-South civil war.

Operation Allied Force

The third and final analogy examined for the Darfur crisis is Operation Allied Force, which for many is one of the most successful air campaigns in history. In response to the violent persecution of Albanians in Kosovo, NATO initiated the air operation to coerce Milosevic into accepting the terms of failed negotiations at Rambouillet. The terms were “the Serbs out; NATO in; the refugees home; a cease-fire in place; and a commitment to work for a peace settlement.”⁸⁷ The operation lasted much longer than expected, and NATO aircraft were unable to stop the Serbs’ ethnic cleansing campaign; yet, after 78 days of air strikes, Milosevic succumbed to NATO’s demands. NATO was ultimately successful because air strikes demonstrated an ability to threaten the powerbase of Milosevic’s regime, and the Serbians were unable to inflict any substantial costs on the United States or its allies. The Kosovo conflict is a seductive analogy for proponents of military intervention in Darfur, because the United States led the operation “to confront a lesser humanitarian crisis” against “a more formidable adversary” and “not a single American died in combat.”⁸⁸ The key presumption is that it is possible for US airpower to extract concessions from an authoritarian regime with modest costs and without a strong commitment to ground forces. Two major differences between the Kosovo and Darfur crises make this presumption faulty: the source of power for al-Bashir’s regime is revenue from Sudan’s oil industry, not an industrialized economy, and international interest in Sudan’s oil reserves will make it difficult to isolate and coerce the regime.

Differences in Powerbase. To maintain order when under air attack and economic hardship, dictatorial regimes often use the media and repressive police and security forces to maintain order. Serbia’s leadership was no exception during Operation Allied Force, and Milosevic used Serbia’s political machine, media, and security forces to stoke Serb nationalism, eliminate independent media, and place disgruntled military leaders under house arrest.⁸⁹ The engine for Milosevic’s powerbase and influence was Serbia’s industrial economy, which was especially vulnerable to systematic air strikes by an advanced air force.⁹⁰ The economically advanced society suffered years of economic sanctions due to the Bosnian war, and the prospects for reconstruction were meager because of international isolation. After a NATO summit in Washington, where leaders of the organization celebrated its 50th anniversary and renewed their resolve to win the Kosovo war, NATO expanded its coercion strategy and targeted the powerbase of Milosevic’s regime.⁹¹ By the

end of April 1999, air strikes cut Serbia's economy in half, and on 28 May, 80 percent of Serbians lost electrical power due to the destruction of power facilities in Serbia's three largest cities.⁹² NATO's willingness to escalate the conflict and severely threaten Serbia's industrial economy played a large role in the coercion of Milosevic and the success of Operation Allied Force.

Al-Bashir's National Congress Party and northern elites also use an extensive party organization, politicized national civil service, and hundreds of thousands of agents and informants to maintain security and power in Sudan. A bureaucracy of over two million Sudanese control the day-to-day operations of the state, but unlike Milosevic in 1999, al-Bashir's regime uses billions of dollars in oil revenues to tend and influence its elite constituency.⁹³ Sudan's five billion barrels of proven oil reserves and potential for much more also insulate the country from international economic pressures.⁹⁴ Despite harsh unilateral sanctions by the United States, Sudan's economy grows almost 10 percent a year.⁹⁵ Since 1998, al-Bashir has focused on developing Sudan's oil wealth, and his vision has helped the regime accomplish its primary objective of staying in power. Sitting on top of a fortune while facing criminal indictment abroad and retaliation at home, al-Bashir's regime is "prepared to kill anyone, suffer massive civilian casualties, and violate every international norm of human rights to stay in power."⁹⁶ Unless strikes are concurrent with an oil embargo supported by the rest of the international community, the government of Sudan will prove extremely difficult to coerce with airpower, because air strikes and no-fly zones do little to threaten Sudan's most valuable natural resource.

Differences in Political Isolation. In addition to economic vulnerability, diplomatic isolation prevented Milosevic and his regime from executing an effective countercoercion strategy against NATO during Operation Allied Force. Despite the breakup of Yugoslavia, the Bosnian war, and years of economic sanctions, Milosevic probably expected the plight of Serbia to arouse sympathy in Russia, a fellow Slav and Orthodox country. To Milosevic's dismay, Russian president Boris Yeltsin never gave him anything beyond verbal support during the Kosovo war for several reasons. Yeltsin and other Russian officials did not personally like Milosevic. They were tired of his making promises he could not keep and never forgave him for his support of the 1991 coup against Yeltsin and Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev.⁹⁷ Russia's reputation and economy were also too weak to risk a costly confrontation with the West or provide Serbia with advanced anti-aircraft missiles to "massacre" NATO aircraft.⁹⁸ Both Yeltsin and Milosevic expected

the NATO coalition to fracture as the war dragged on, but NATO's resolve hardened, along with talk of NATO expansion. Three weeks into the air war, Yeltsin appointed Viktor Chernomyrdin, a former premier with strong ties with the United States, to negotiate an end to the war. He was not fond of Milosevic, and after negotiating a peace plan with the G-7, Chernomyrdin traveled to Belgrade and coldly told Milosevic to accept the proposal or air strikes would escalate.⁹⁹ NATO's growing strength and ability to attack Serbia with impunity compelled Milosevic's only ally to act as a third-party coercer on behalf of NATO. Russia's abandonment of Serbia and Serbia's isolation from the rest of the international community were critical to Milosevic's acceptance of G-7 demands.

Al-Bashir has stronger ties with the international community, primarily because of extensive foreign investment in Sudan's oil sector and the potential for billions of dollars in additional development. Despite extensive economic sanctions by the United States, numerous countries invest in Sudan, including Arab countries and several of America's allies. France, Jordan, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sweden, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom all have equity stakes in Sudan's oil blocks.¹⁰⁰ India and Malaysia also have large investments in the country, but Sudan's most powerful political and diplomatic partner is China.

In 1959 Sudan was the fourth African nation to recognize the People's Republic of China. The countries have had a good relationship ever since, and in 1994, al-Bashir invited Chinese companies to develop Sudan's nascent oil sector.¹⁰¹ China accepted the offer and nurtured a relationship with Sudan beneficial to both countries. China used Sudan as a bridgehead for investments in the rest of Africa. Sudan rapidly developed its oil industry and used the proceeds to strengthen state security and procure weapons. China's \$8 billion in pipeline, refineries, and basic infrastructure is a substantial incentive to support a strong and stable Sudanese government. China uses its position on the UN Security Council to soften initiatives that could weaken al-Bashir's regime and to abide by Beijing's philosophy of noninterference in the domestic affairs of sovereign states.¹⁰²

Mismatches between the rhetoric and enforcement of UN resolutions after the Darfur atrocities highlight the difficulty of using economic sanctions and political isolation as instruments to erode al-Bashir's powerbase. The first UN resolution written specifically for Darfur is Resolution 1556 (30 July 2004), which required the Sudanese government to disarm the *janjaweed* in 30 days. The only enforcement mechanism in the resolution

was to impose an arms embargo against the Darfur region, not against Sudan itself. Little changed in March 2005 when the Security Council passed Resolution 1591, which applied travel bans against four antagonists on both sides of the conflict but did not condemn or extend sanctions to the Sudanese government or the oil industry.¹⁰³ China, Russia, and the Arab League opposed America's stronger proposals because of economic self-interests and skepticism of humanitarian arguments that the United States and others could use to encroach on their national sovereignty.¹⁰⁴ Unless the security and humanitarian situation changes drastically in Sudan, the United States will find it difficult to apply effective coercive measures against al-Bashir's regime, especially since the international community was unwilling to condemn the Sudanese government immediately after the height of atrocities in Darfur.

Policy Implications for Darfur

Operations Provide Comfort, Deny Flight, and Allied Force are seductive analogies for proponents of a humanitarian intervention in Darfur because these campaigns featured suffering refugees and the successful coercion of a malevolent dictator with a preponderance of airpower. Using these operations as analytical tools to determine the political initiative required for a humanitarian response in Darfur is imprudent, however. The wide range of actors, competing interests, relatively low priority of the Darfur crisis, and the unfavorable geopolitical landscape make it tough to generate the international consensus necessary for a legitimate military intervention. Several influential nations, including China, invest heavily in Sudan's oil industry and prefer a strong and stable Sudanese government to ensure a reasonable return on their investments. Compelling powerful China in 2009 to turn its back on its gateway to the African continent will be much more difficult than convincing the comparatively weak Russia to ditch Milosevic in 1999. The hypocrisies of US intervention in Iraq and its subsequent overextension in the Middle East also propel lesser powers and the Arab League to oppose international activism and the abuse of the "responsibility to protect" to justify interventions.¹⁰⁵ Still others are opposed to military solutions to the Darfur crisis because of potential damage to the North-South peace process and the threat to humanitarian aid operations. Due to conditions internal and external to the Darfur conflict, the United States will have to expend considerable amounts of political

capital, significantly more than in the 1990s, to secure UN or even NATO approval for a humanitarian intervention using military forces.

	Synopsis of Conflict	Key Presumptions	Likenesses to a Military Intervention in Darfur	Differences from Darfur Conflict
Operation Provide Comfort (Iraq)	A broad coalition of states defended Kurdish refugees from Iraqi forces and aided their safe return to Kurdistan.	A similar operation could aid Darfuri refugees in Chad.	The international coalitions confronted incompetent governments that used racial or ethnic identities to divide, control, and oppress their populations.	Return of Darfuri refugees is not a vital interest to the United States and its allies. The international community has not demonstrated the desire or ability to apply force effectively in Sudan.
Operation Deny Flight (Bosnia)	Economic sanctions, legal, indictments, and air strikes strategically timed with Muslim and Croat ground offensives compelled Milosevic to negotiate with NATO.	Timely air strikes and indictments could aid cease-fire negotiations in Darfur.	Low strategic interests, competing coalition objectives, and elusive nonstate actors posed significant challenges in the coercion of the targeted governments.	The objective of the Darfuris is not independence but physical protection, political access, and a greater share of national wealth. Concerns about the Darfur conflict are subordinate to the resolution of the North-South civil war.
Operation Allied Force (Kosovo)	While suffering zero combat casualties, a massive air operation compelled Milosevic to withdraw Serb forces from Kosovo.	Airpower can extract concessions with modest costs and without a strong commitment of ground forces.	The coalitions used two coercive mechanisms: denial and power-base erosion. The coalitions used three coercive instruments: airpower, economic sanctions, and political isolation.	Sudan does not have an advanced industrial economy that is sensitive to air strikes. Sudan in 2009 is not as politically isolated as Serbia in the 1990s.

Figure 2. Similarities and differences between Darfur and analogous humanitarian operations.

Theoretically, the United States could act unilaterally and hope a large portion of the international community or the UN blesses the operation retroactively, as in Kosovo. Perhaps President Obama and his secretary of state believe a true no-fly zone and nothing more is sufficiently benign to resist international criticism, yet is imposing it enough to prevent the

Sudanese government and its proxies from terrorizing villages in Darfur?¹⁰⁶ A small demonstration of American airpower compelled Iraqi security forces to leave Zakho in Kurdistan; why would not a similar demonstration work against the *janjaweed* in Darfur?¹⁰⁷ The problem in Darfur is that a no-fly zone would provide no compelling reason for the *janjaweed* to leave. The offensive advantages provided by explosive 50-gallon drums kicked out the back of a cargo plane are relatively minor, even against defenseless villages. It is easy enough for the local Arab tribes, militia, and Chadian rebels that comprise the *janjaweed* to remain where they are, with or without American aircraft flying overhead. Their only alternative is to become refugees themselves. A no-fly zone is not imposing enough to convince people to leave what they perceive to be their homeland.

Maybe the “no-fly zone” advocated by President Obama is more than that. Perhaps he intends to follow the advice of the US ambassador to the United Nations and sprinkle air strikes on Khartoum and on air bases to compel al-Bashir’s regime to reign in the destabilizing *janjaweed*.¹⁰⁸ The problem is who will do the reigning in? The regime enlisted the help of the *janjaweed* in 2003 to conduct its counterinsurgency campaign because it did not have the military forces to do so itself. There is no reason to believe it does now, either. Maybe the advocates of extensive air strikes believe that the devastation could be costly enough to compel al-Bashir to try a little harder. If so, their hopes are unfounded. Sudan’s extensive oil reserves are perfectly safe underground, and air operations targeting the *janjaweed*, when they can be found, will do little to threaten the regime. In addition, the indictment of al-Bashir for crimes against humanity and overtures for “regime change” fail to assure the president that the cost of capitulation is acceptable, no matter how devastating the air attacks. Unless it is prepared to remove al-Bashir with brute force using friendly ground forces or rebel proxies, the United States will have to offer the president a credible alternative to surrender for an air campaign to be successful.¹⁰⁹

In addition to the meager prospects of success, the costs associated with the employment of coercive airpower in Darfur could be enormous. The Sudanese will execute counterstrategies to neutralize threats and to create problems for the United States and opposing forces.¹¹⁰ The presence of thousands of humanitarian aid workers, two million displaced persons, a precarious peace with South Sudan, and extensive economic ties with China provide Sudan an excellent deterrent. If deterrence fails, the regime has numerous ways to create pandemonium and threaten the

efficacy and domestic support for the intervention. The recent expulsion of relief organizations that provide 40 percent of the aid in Darfur and lack of response by the United Nations is a relevant example.¹¹¹ The desire to recycle airpower strategies in Darfur and the execution of counterstrategies by al-Bashir's regime could spin Sudan out of control and put the Obama administration in the unenviable position of having to explain to the American public how a few good intentions led to a catastrophe.¹¹²

Instead of risking escalation and disaster to reconcile past injustices, America's strategy in Sudan should focus on the future. In accordance with the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, Sudan will conduct multiparty elections in 2009 and a referendum in 2011 to determine whether South Sudan will secede. Should South Sudan split from the rest of the country, which most likely it will, North Sudan will lose 80 percent of its proven oil reserves, a vastly more credible threat to al-Bashir than air strikes.¹¹³ Blocking South Sudan's vote for independence, contesting the results, or suspending oil revenues is tantamount to war, and the subsequent carnage could dwarf that of the Darfur conflict. The United States needs to provide positive inducements and assurances that the 2009 and 2011 elections are in the best interest of the Sudanese government. Allowing China to pass a Security Council resolution to defer the indictment of al-Bashir is a good place to start. The indictment is counterproductive and does little to deter the parties in the conflict from conducting operations they deem necessary for their survival.¹¹⁴ The United States could also offset the losses in revenue anticipated by the secession of South Sudan by lifting sanctions, allowing Sudan access to US oil refining technology, and facilitating Sudan's exploitation of petroleum resources in the Red Sea.¹¹⁵ Incrementally, providing positive incentives for implementing the CPA and removing Sudan from America's list of state sponsors of terror will do more to alleviate the atrocities in Darfur than would any no-fly zone.

Conclusion

The international community should never forget the tragic events in Darfur, but the Obama administration should not let past atrocities and compelling historical analogies cloud its judgment on the efficacy of airpower coercion in Sudan. Operations Provide Comfort, Deliberate Force,

and Allied Force were highly successful in compelling Saddam and Milosevic to succumb to pressure from US airpower, but conditions internal and external to the conflicts were vital to their success. With Russia in decline and NATO expanding, conditions were favorable for the United States and its allies to apply pressure to Saddam, Milosevic, and their supporters. Today, Sudan's political ally, China, is in ascent, while the US military is busy conducting two full-scale occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Despite President Obama's campaign proclamations and his appointment of retired major general J. Scott Gration as special envoy to Sudan, the administration will find that generating the political momentum and consensus necessary for a legitimate military intervention will be a major challenge.¹¹⁶

International consensus aside, it is still doubtful a no-fly zone or air strikes could repeat the successes from northern Iraq and Serbia in Darfur. The source of power and influence of al-Bashir and his extensive state apparatus is oil, an underground resource that is resistant to the effects of airpower in the long term. When threatened, al-Bashir can use the tentative peace of Sudan's civil war, upcoming elections, and two million internally displaced persons as a deterrent. US military intervention and the failure of that deterrent could spark another civil war, and in the words of one African diplomat, "If the North and South return to war, it will unlock the gates of hell."¹¹⁷ This is hardly the objective of airpower for peace enforcement, and the United States does not have the desire or capability to play games of brinkmanship with al-Bashir. The United States needs to give al-Bashir tangible assurances that cooperation with the international community will result in his survival, a pledge that American airpower cannot provide. ■■■

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16. BDHA, *Sudan—Complex Emergency*.

17. James Kurth, "Legal Ideals Versus Military Realities," *Orbis* 50, no. 1 (2006): 87; Prunier, *Darfur: A 21st Century Genocide*, 8; and de Waal, "Darfur and the Failure," 1043.

18. de Waal, "Darfur and the Failure," 1043.

19. Prunier, *Darfur: A 21st Century Genocide*, 1.

20. After the Sudanese government expelled 13 humanitarian relief organizations from the region, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said, "This is a horrendous situation that is going to cause untold misery and suffering for the people of Darfur, particularly those in the refugee camps. The real question is what kind of pressure can be brought to bear on President Bashir and the government in Khartoum to understand that they will be held responsible for every single death that occurs in those camps?" Peter Baker, "Adding Pressure to Sudan, Obama Will Tap Retired General as Special Envoy," *New York Times*, 18 March 2009; and Rice, Lake, and Payne, "We Saved Europeans."

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