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American Politics

US Policy Towards Darfur

In 2005, the Bush Administration declared the situation in Darfur, Sudan to be genocide. Since that time the United States has been involved in the making of several policies towards Darfur. There has been much debate within the U.S. on how to address this situation as the extremely volatile area of Sudan has the potential to harbor International terrorists. Though policy has been implemented by more than one administration, they are relatively similar in their goals and actions.

In April of 2008, the US Department of State suggested that Sudan was one of the Bush administration’s “highest foreign policy priorities” (U.S. Department of State, 2008). In the time spanning between 2005 and 2008, the United States provided over $4 billion in humanitarian, peacekeeping and development assistance to the internally displaced people of Sudan and Chad. The Bush Administration also stressed its profound support for the keeping of “Comprehensive Peace Agreement” (CPA), which was signed by the North and South Sudan in 2005. In 2007, the United States also sent nearly 30,000 Peacekeepers to the Sudan in accordance with a Resolution passed by the United Nations Security Council (U.S. Department of State, 2008).

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In October of 2009, the current administration unveiled their new policy towards Sudan. The United States wants to focus its policy goals on the implementation of the CPA, as well as working to “resolve and prevent conflict throughout Sudan” (Office of the Spokesman, 2009). The policy plans to “enhance civilian protection” by strengthening the support it gives to United Nations aid workers in Sudan and Chad in the form of monetary and diplomatic aid. The envoy to Sudan will “establish and maintain a dialogue with armed movements in Darfur” and the United States government would also willingly support any peace agreements that can be met (Office of the Spokesman, 2009).

The main action that the current administration wants to accomplish is to successfully support internal peacekeeping efforts within Sudan, without being involved on a military level. The administration also hopes that they will be able to work internationally to help stabilize the government and offer democratic and stability incentives (Office of the Spokesman, 2009). The current administration hopes that these efforts will help create better governing in Sudan, more democratic tendencies, and will also prevent terrorists from developing a stronghold in the destabilized regions of Sudan. The White House website states that “ending the crisis in Darfur and ensuring Sudan’s long-term stability through the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement is a top priority for the Obama Administration…We are committed to working with the international community to end the suffering, seek a lasting settlement to the violence, and ensure a stable and secure future for the region” (White House, 2009).

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The key political figures involved in the current policy, apart from President Obama, are Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the US Representative to the United Nations, Susan Rice, and Special Envoy to Sudan, Scott Gration (U.S. State Department, 2009). The United States Department of State debriefing on President Obama’s policy toward Sudan also states that “the strong voices of committed advocates and members of Congress have been indispensable to elevating Sudan on the U.S. policy agenda” (Office of the Spokesman, 2009).

In a press conference, in which the Obama administration unveiled its policy towards Sudan, Susan Rice applauded the administration’s policy and stated that in order to stabilize the Darfur region, the United States is “prepared to work with all sides”. She also stated that a mix of incentives and pressure would be used to improve the situation and uphold the peace agreement. Susan Rice also stressed that “there will be no rewards for the status quo, no incentives without concrete and tangible progress…There will be significant consequences for parties that backslide or simply stand still. All parties will be held to account” (“State.gov”, 2009).

Many argue that the current administration is not making enough of an effort to end the conflict in Sudan. There has been a lot of negative feedback from the media regarding the response of the Obama administration. The Wall Street Journal quotes the President during one of the speeches he made while running for office, ‘*"I am deeply concerned by reports that the Bush Administration is negotiating a normalization of relations with the Government of Sudan. . . . “*’. The article argues that “at worst, Sudan might be forced to live with a somewhat longer list of U.S. or international sanctions, none of which have had the slightest effect on its policies toward Darfur, much less its abiding popularity with China and Arab states” (Wall Street

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Journal, 2009). It’s an opinion held by many activists and columnists across the United States that the government is half-heartedly dealing with the situation in Darfur.

The Washington Post has also released coverage of the Obama Administration’s policy towards Sudan. One article states that the Obama administration has “settled on a policy toward Sudan that offers a dramatically softer approach than the president had advocated on the campaign trail” (Lynch & Sheridan, 2009). Many activist groups have also joined the fray in pushing for stronger action against Sudan. The “Sudan Now” organization has released several statements and petitions to President Obama, urging him to open dialogue with countries, such as China, and put more pressure on them to become involved in ending the crisis in Darfur. The organization also stresses that the administration live up to the promises it made while Obama was running for office, and has even entitled it’s advocacy group “Keep the Promise: Sudan Now” (Sudan Action Now, n.d.)

The main issue is not the lack of awareness; it is a lack of political activism that stems from a strong desire to not become in another military confrontation. Rewarding Sudan for good behavior has not worked in the past and will not work in the future. Many people in Congress and in Activist groups, are not pleased with the current policy of “pressure and incentives” that the current administration has set in place in order to “cajole the government in Khartoum into pursuing peace in the troubled Darfur region” as well as “providing the United States greater cooperation in stemming international terrorism” (Lynch & Sheridan,

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2009). There should be a growing concern over the fact that Sudan has increasingly become a haven for terrorists and President Al-Bashir has been offered refuge in several extremist states.

In response to this, the United States should take a firm stance on its foreign policy towards Sudan. The United States should work towards developing international support in order to pressure Sudan into adhering to the terms set up by the CPA. Placing pressure on countries, such as China, that have an invested interest in Sudan would greatly help to implement the CPA and ensure stability. The United States should also put more pressure on the international community to aid in the arrest of Al-Bashir since an arrest warrant has been made by the United Nations International Criminal Court. Through more political activism it is possible for the current administration to reach a more effective foreign policy towards Sudan.

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