

## Jumping the Gun?

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The announcement that Canada will commit sixty soldiers to serve in the Sudan once again raises questions as to what the Canadian government has learned from the ethnic violence rollercoaster ride of the 1990s. Haphazard commitment of Canadian forces in 1992 to help escort humanitarian aid in the middle of a three-way Bosnian civil war was the first step into a deep four-year UN quagmire that produced Srebrenica. Similarly, the armed humanitarian intervention in Somalia in 1993-94 was disastrous and generated the withdrawal of a humiliated international community. In 1996, Canada was bamboozled by those complicit in Rwandan ethnic violence into trying to intervene in Zaire. Responding to pressure, be it domestic or international, Canadian baby-boom-era leaders must learn that instant gratification in incredibly complex situations like Bosnia, Somalia, Zaire and now the Sudan is a prescription for disaster. And the people who wear it are our soldiers, not the politicians.

There is a school of thought that believes that a genocide or something like it is occurring in the Darfur region. It has many high profile adherents. At the same time, a hotly-debated unofficial doctrine called "Responsibility to Protect," not coincidentally championed by elements in Canada's foreign policy community, is making the rounds of the UN. R2P, in theory, suggests that national sovereignty is no longer completely static, that the international community with the UN's blessing, has a duty and a right to intervene if a Rwanda is in the offing, whether or not the target country in question accepts the legitimacy of the intervention.

At the same time, however, there is another school of thought that believes international law is the cornerstone of the international community, again as expressed through the UN and its bodies. This school

favours a gradualist approach to legally determine whether or not genocide is occurring, and then applying every possible means short of armed intervention first before resorting to force. Both schools emerged in the wake of the tragedies in Rwanda and Bosnia and both were fuelled by debates over NATO's military action to stop genocide in Kosovo in 1999. One school criticizes the other for moving too quickly and riding roughshod over legality, while the other argues that the legalistic approach is too slow and gives the genocidaires time to do their dirty work. What is the right path for Canada?

Canadian decisionmaking when it comes to these matters has to be rational rather than reflexive. Indeed, we can afford such an approach because we do not yet have the capacity to lead an intervention. The situation in the Sudan is bad: there is no doubt about that. But what are our national objectives in the region? Where do they fit with our global objectives? How exactly will we employ military force to further them? Where has that discussion taken place so that we the Canadian people can participate in the process? Will the Canadian government learn from its 1996 experience in Zaire that the apparent situation as presented in the media can be manipulated by sophisticated and experienced antagonists for their sometimes obscure but ultimately lethal purposes?

The commitment of sixty Canadians to the Sudan is an important test case. If they are restricted in their dress, weaponry, and movement by the Sudanese government, this will set a precedent on par with what happened in Bosnia in 1992 where UNPROFOR was similarly restricted and thus limited in what it could accomplish. Legalistic restriction creates a mindset, one that we learned was not conducive to effective military operations. Canada will be locked into playing a game that has rules imposed by others. Does the Canadian government really want to restrict its' future freedom of action in this dangerous and complex environment

by precipitously sending soldiers in response to a power play in the House of Commons?

This is not an argument against intervention in the Sudan, or elsewhere, for that matter. Canada should intervene when its interests are threatened. Our new foreign policy makes it clear that we will move away from 'old think' when it comes to intervention: "we acknowledge that any successful framework of global governance incorporates power as well as rules." If we are not careful, however, the Sudan will look more and more like Bosnia circa 1992, with the African Union forces playing the role of UNPROFOR and Canadian troops restricted by myopic legal precedents, dangerous rules of engagement, and outgunned by belligerent forces. If we are going to get involved in the Sudan, let us do it right. Let us learn from the past fifteen years. Let us not be thrown back in time because of a domestic political squabble. Is the Canadian objective to save lives and stabilize a region of interest for Canada, or is it to engage in short term tokenism for political survival? Soldiers should be seen as knights, not pawns. And one does not discard knights wantonly in a protracted chess match.