

# Canada must choose its humanitarian crises wisely

While a mission to Sudan would look good to the international community, we must fulfill our obligations in Afghanistan first



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On 17 March, the Canadian Peace Alliance staged a series of "Canada out of Afghanistan now" rallies across the country. Denouncing Afghanistan as a "war of conquest," protesters gathered to demand a withdrawal from the embattled middle-eastern country.

Part of the resistance to the War in Afghanistan can be traced to belief in a dichotomy in foreign intervention, whereby peacekeeping is held in direct opposition to war. The argument put forth is that peacekeeping is a passive, idyllic method of international intervention, whereas war is an act of aggression. Yet leaders such as

Romeo Dallaire, commander of the ill-fated 1994 peacekeeping mission in Rwanda, would likely be among the first to remind these people how quickly a peacekeeping mission can effectively become an all-out war.

Ultimately, much of the opposition to the War in Afghanistan simply represents a failure to frame the issue accurately. Many of its opponents compare it to the immensely unpopular American-led War in Iraq: an act of imperialism with no justifiable cause.

But the war in Afghanistan is not the war in Iraq. The latter—based on poor intelligence and in support of dubious foreign policy objectives—is controversial for good reason. The War in Afghanistan, on the other hand, has serious foreign policy and global security issues at stake: namely, meeting the challenges posed by states that harbour terrorist organizations within their borders. There's also the very real issue about

how to address states that oppress or kill their own people.

While any sense of the moral purity of both missions are undermined by vested economic interests (hence the accusations of imperialism), so too is the mission that many opponents of the Afghanistan war suggest: a peacekeeping mission in Sudan.

**Unfortunately for the people of Afghanistan, no such celebrity spokespeople have advocated on their behalf.**

Anyone who's paid even a passing amount of attention to international affairs over the past few years should be well acquainted with the tribal warfare in Sudan's Darfur region. The

government of that country has been known for its brutal treatment of various minority groups since 1953.

More recently, in 2003 the Sudanese government allowed the Janjaweed militias complete freedom in the region in response to armed resistance by the Sudan Liberation Army and the Justice and Equality Movement. What has unfolded since is a genocidal campaign of unrestricted rape and violence against the population of Darfur.

That same year, Calgary-based Talisman Energy, which had been developing oil resources in the region, sold off its controversial investments in Sudan, where it had been involved since 1998.

However, apart from the ongoing genocide, the presence of oil reserves make a Sudan mission every bit as questionable as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. A UN envoy to Darfur could even be defined as a glamour mission, as numerous celebrities have

come out in favour of intervention there. Unfortunately for the people of Afghanistan, no such celebrity spokespeople have advocated on their behalf.

Withdrawing from Afghanistan, on the other hand, would essentially be an invitation for the Taliban—a regime previously noted for its genocidal treatment of Hindus and Shi'a Muslims—to return and impose its brutal and oppressive rule once again. Without the presence of NATO troops, fledgling Afghan Defence Forces would be able to offer little resistance.

Certainly, the international community as a whole has a responsibility to Darfur—this much is mandated by the UN's Responsibility to Protect doctrine. However, it has the same responsibility to the Afghani people at this point. Granting the wishes of the Canadian Peace Alliance would only be allowing those responsibilities to go unfulfilled.



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