

# The Void: Why the Movement Needs Help

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In late April 1994, as the machete-wielding génocidaires commenced their fourth week of extermination in Rwanda, Representative Patricia Schroeder was asked why the United States was not doing more. “There are some groups terribly concerned about the gorillas,” she said. But, while advocates could mobilize a domestic clamor around an endangered species, endangered humans were a harder sell. “It sounds terrible,” she added, but “people just don’t know what can be done about the people.”

Flash forward twelve years to the National Mall last Sunday in Washington, D.C. In an unprecedented U.S. rally against genocide, tens of thousands of people (including me) turned out to demand that the president do more. Sudanese refugees could not believe their eyes as they saw a sea of all races, religions, and ethnic origins wearing t-shirts that read, instead of mourning a genocide, stop one and holding placards that read, not on our watch (an adaptation of the “Not on my watch” that President Bush scribbled on a memo on the Clinton administration’s failure to help Rwanda). Though the rally lasted nearly four hours and the speakers were of varying quality, protesters stayed fixated on the stage, eager to cheer, boo, or chant at the slightest prompt. If the pattern of the twentieth century was that the American public abetted official indifference to genocide by not speaking out, here was that pattern defied. Over the last three years, in response to the slaughter of more than 400,000 Darfuris, an American anti-genocide movement has taken form. Although the Bush administration has not done nearly enough to respond, it is thanks to this movement that the United States has done more than any other country.

But, sadly—with U.S. military assets stretched to their breaking point, U.S. political capital dwindling, and U.S. capacity for moral leadership at its lowest point in history—the United States cannot stop this genocide without the help of others. And the countries that have the troops, political pull, and legitimacy to enter Darfur to halt the violence seem largely indifferent. They are under scant domestic pressure, and they are suspicious of Bush’s motives for speaking out. Even if the administration responds to the noise it has heard, should the rest of the world remain out of touch, the people of Darfur will remain out of luck.

The nascent anti-genocide movement already has made its presence felt. Fueled by the advocacy of human rights groups, Nicholas Kristof of *The New York Times*, Ruth Messinger of the American Jewish World Service, John Prendergast of the international Crisis Group, and Eric Reeves of Smith College, college students, who were in elementary school during the Rwandan genocide, began to mobilize in 2004. In October 2005, when Senator Richard Lugar, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was slow to send to the full Senate a bill that urged the tightening of U.S. penalties against Sudan, the student-founded Genocide Intervention Network identified Lugar’s top 200 donors. Then, Georgetown and George Washington students phoned the donors to ask them to convince Lugar to move the bill along. Two weeks later, Lugar introduced the legislation to the full Senate, where it passed easily.

Since Americans hold an estimated \$91 billion of stocks in foreign companies doing business in Sudan, students have also launched divestment drives modeled on the antiapartheid efforts of the 1980s. In late 2004, Harvard roommates Manav Bhatnagar and Ben Collins started a successful campaign to convince the Harvard Corporation to divest the university holdings of \$3.6 million in PetroChina oil company stocks. In Harvard’s wake, eleven universities, including the mammoth University of California, followed suit, prohibiting holdings in such companies as ongc (India), Petronas (Malaysia), Alcatel (France), ABB (Switzerland), and Siemens (Germany). And the student effort has expanded into a more broad-based one. New Jersey, Illinois, Oregon, and Maine have passed legislation to strip their public pension funds of tainted stocks. Similar legislation is pending in at least a dozen other states.

The citizen activism has not gotten the Bush administration to treat Darfur with the urgency that genocide warrants, but it has generated political results. Congress is poised to increase funding for the African Union (AU) protection force. The administration, for its part, acquiesced to the referral of Sudan’s atrocities to the

International Criminal Court, got the U.N. Security Council to impose asset freezes and travel bans on a few perpetrators, deployed Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick to the region five times to gerrymander a peace deal, and—most recently and most crucially—pressed for the absorption of the 7,000- person AU monitoring mission into a better-equipped, more mobile 20,000-person U.N. protection force backed by nato. Darfuris would benefit enormously from such a force, but, now that the administration is finally taking Darfur seriously, it needs to undertake multilateral diplomacy, which has never been its strong suit.

Thanks to the war in Iraq, sending a sizable U.S. force to Darfur is not an option. Units in Iraq are already on their third tours, and the crumbling Afghan peace demands evermore resources. Moreover, sending Americans into another Islamic country is unadvisable, given the ease with which jihadis could pour across Sudan's porous and expansive borders. Making Darfur a magnet for foreign fighters or yet another front in the global proxy war between the United States and Al Qaeda would just compound the refugees' woes.

The key to protecting Darfur is for the United States to mobilize a united front—including Russia, and China—to force Khartoum to allow the deployment of a far larger U.N. force. But U.S. conduct in combating terrorism has drastically reduced America's ability to make the moral case. And other countries don't seem very interested in civilian protection. In March, after Bush finally issued a public call for the African Union to be replaced by a U.N. successor force, African leaders felt they were being condescended to and revolted, deciding merely to extend the AU's mandate.

Even if Khartoum were to admit non-African forces, getting nato and the United Nations to move requires getting the states that constitute them to move—and states generally avoid sending their troops to dangerous places unless they get riches, oil, bases, or enhanced security in return. Western countries have largely washed their hands of peacekeeping in the last decade. Canada, which considers itself the “father of U.N. peacekeeping,” deployed nearly 3,000 blue helmets in 1994, but it has just 169 troops active in U.N. missions today. Denmark contributed approximately 1,300 peacekeepers in 1994 but fields just 71 today. Soon after Bush urged nato involvement in Darfur, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, the head of nato, spoke as much to the mood in Europe as he did to that in Africa when he told PBS that Africans “feel very strongly [that they] should be responsible for events on their own continent.”

Because European powers have opted out of peacekeeping, the leading contributors to U.N. missions—Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Jordan—are overstretched. Many are also spooked by Sudanese lobbying, which, in the words of one senior U.N. official, has taken the form of, “If you like Iraq, you'll love Darfur!” There is thus a colossal void on the international stage, where all states hail the universal “responsibility to protect,” but none are eager to exercise it.

Sunday's rally, and the anti-genocide movement it embodies, is essential. Without it, the Bush administration would reflexively focus on Iraq, Iran, and North Korea and leave Darfur to be managed by its in-house humanitarians. U.S. pressure—applied at a far higher level and in a far more sustained manner—has made a profound difference with Khartoum in the past, leading it to expel Osama bin Laden and to make essential compromises with rebels in the South. But, at this juncture, U.S. pressure is not sufficient to do the job, and other countries must be brought around. And, for that to happen, the burgeoning endangered people's movement must spread beyond U.S. shores.

Walking away from the rally in Washington, a British friend of mine shook his head and said, “You'll never hear me say this again, but today made me want my kids to grow up American.” When I asked why, he said, “What happened today could never, ever happen in Europe.” Europeans fond of denouncing both the Rwandan genocide and American imperialism had better prove him wrong.

*Samantha Power* is the author of “A Problem from Hell”: America and the Age of Genocide.