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December Roundtable: Introduction

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December Roundtable: Introduction

Abstract

An annotation of:

"The Activist." Harper's Magazine. November 2008.

Keywords

Human rights, Sudan, Darfur

“The Activist.” *Harper's Magazine*. November 2008.

An Annotation

The ongoing conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan has been illustrative of the need for improved international diplomacy in conflict resolution and peace building. In an account of his experiences traveling in Darfur with academic and diplomat Alex de Waal, author Nick McDonell raises compelling questions about the role of traditional diplomacy in creating lasting peace. For McDonell, the establishment of lasting peace in the region demands recognition of the complex realities on the ground. Specifically, McDonell writes that the numerous obstacles to the peace process, such as natural resource depletion, ethnic strife, and competing political rivalries, must be addressed.

“Issue-awareness campaigns may draw attention to important causes, but they can also motivate counterproductive demands among warring factions.”

For McDonell, traditional diplomacy has not been effective in securing peace and stability in the region. According to the international community, the arrest warrant request for Omar Hassan al-Bashir by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in July marked a significant turn of events for perceived perpetrators of the conflict. However, as McDonell discusses, de Waal asserts that the need for the international community to hold Bashir responsible for acts of genocide and crimes against humanity is detrimental to the fragile peace that has been made. Since July, de Waal has been outspoken about the adverse effects of unintended consequences that may have drastic and deadly repercussions on the ground in Darfur, and that the ICC warrant “will endanger the people we wish to defend.”

“[Alex de Waal’s] primary argument was that a threatened Bashir could do much to damage the already fragile peace, and that the ICC had no ability to back up its threat with an actual arrest or trial.”

The delicate peace among warring ethnic and political factions within government and among rebel groups cannot be sustained indefinitely. Importantly, there are various challenges to peace in the region such as determining who has the authority to make an agreement, defining who exactly the *janjaweed* are, and deciding how justice should be achieved, all of which must be addressed if peace is to be secured for all. McDonell, as a former student of de Waal, suggests that in order for lasting peace to be established in Darfur, conventional forms of international diplomacy that seek to place blame and accountability for crimes committed must look to the complex situation on the ground. However, the points raised by McDonell and de Waal speak more generally about the need for improved and diverse forms of international diplomacy in conflict resolution and peace building. Moreover, as McDonell emphasizes, peace processes and the establishment of lasting peace is not simplistic. The establishment of peace in Darfur, and in future violent conflicts, must address the reality of the welfare and safety of those on the ground in addition to ensuring justice and accountability for crimes committed.

These issues and others are considered in this month’s Roundtable.