

Ambassador Rice Lies About Darfur Genocide

by David Cherry

March 27—Susan Rice spoke of “the ongoing genocide” in Darfur, Sudan, in her first public appearance, Jan. 26, after her confirmation as U.S. Ambassador to the UN. In so doing, she announced her commitment to the five-year campaign for regime change against Sudan’s President Omar Hassan al-Bashir. The campaign has achieved the first indictment of a sitting President by the so-called International Criminal Court (ICC).

But Rice is too clever a liar to attempt to back up her wild claim of “ongoing genocide” with the specifics necessary to establish it. Because they aren’t there, and she knows it. That puts her in the tradition of the 1930s British “Big Lie” campaign in support of Hitler, Dr. Josef Goebbels’ propaganda machine, and the Tony Blair/Dick Cheney “Big Lie” promulgated to justify the invasion of Iraq.



UN photo/Paulo Filgueiras

U.S. Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice is too clever a liar to attempt to back up her charges of “ongoing genocide” in Darfur—she knows the evidence is not there.

Not only was Rice not able to cite any evidence for genocidal intent (the government she accuses of genocide built the first three universities in Darfur in the 1990s, and scores of schools), but she also failed to identify any ethnic or racial group that is a target for elimination. (The claim of “Arab vs. African” is specious; most Arabic speakers are “Arabs” by cultural adoption.) Finally, Rice did not cite numbers of deaths.

But she does not have to do any of the above. She can let her Big Lie ride on the wave of falsehoods propagated by the Save the Darfur Coalition; the now defunct Coalition for International Justice; Smith College Professor of English Eric Reeves, a self-appointed expert on Darfur and Sudan; and the “validation” of these “sources” by citation in the British House of Commons, the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and the rest of the major press.

The focus of this article is on the actual number of deaths that have resulted from the fighting in Darfur, and the gross inflation of that number by the regime-change apparatus with which Rice is associated.

The Background

Darfur has experienced decades of increasing desertification as the Sahara expands southward. The poorest of Darfur’s inhabitants, the camel-riding nomads in the North, have increasingly encroached on the lands of the settled agriculturalists further south, leading to a conflict over land and access to water. In 2002, however, the Sudan Liberation Army, and the Justice and Equality Movement appeared, and began attacking police, army barracks, civilians, and infrastructure. The first widely publicized attack came in February 2003. The government hit back to contain the insurgency, at the cost of many more lives.

The insurrectionists soon had the help of the regime-change apparatus in the United States, which began shouting, in early 2004, about genocide. They also had the help of Eric Reeves, who claimed in January 2005, on the basis of an ill-informed and simplistic analysis, that 400,000 people had died from violence, disease, and malnutrition, as a result of the fighting. In April 2005, the Coalition for International Justice published a seemingly more sophisticated analysis done by sociologist John Hagan and others, concluding that 396,563 had died. Subsequently, Reeves incorporated Hagan’s calculations into his own analysis.

What Do We Know of Darfur Mortality?

One would expect a team of professionals in epidemiology and public health, with extensive experience in estimating mortality in disasters, and with data obtained at the site, to provide a more reliable estimate of deaths than a specialist in literature or sociology. That expectation was borne out in a review published by the U.S. Government Accountability Office in November 2006, of several estimates (www.gao.gov/new.items/d0724.pdf). The review does not support anything like the “300,000 to 400,000 deaths” included in almost every news article about Darfur or President Bashir today.

The review, by 12 specialists, and with input from two others, assessed each estimate on the basis of source data; methods, including extrapolations and assumptions; objectivity; and sufficiency of reporting how the study was done. The reviewers obtained additional information from the authors when necessary.

The six studies reviewed were produced by the following institutions and individuals:

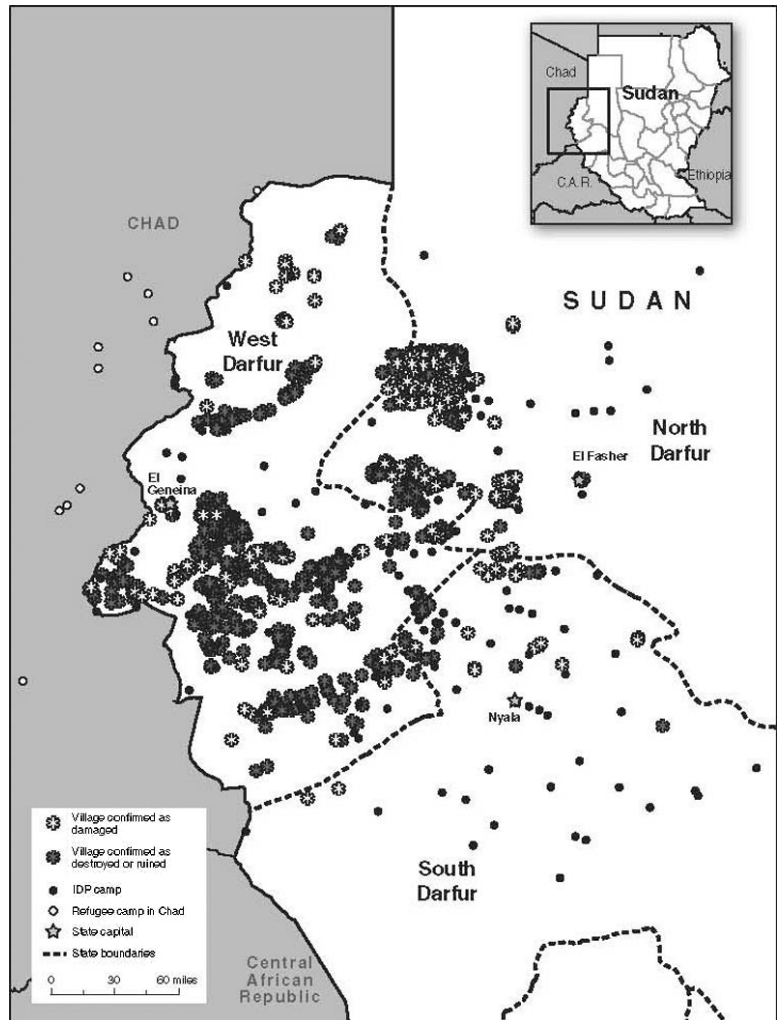
- Center for Research in the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), Université Catholique de Louvain, Brussels, affiliated with the World Health Organization (two studies, covering 22 months);
- U.S. Department of State (23 months)
- World Health Organization (WHO) (7 months);
- Eric Reeves (31 months);
- John Hagan et al. (26 months);
- Jan Coebergh, a Dutch neurologist who has worked in Darfur (21 months).

The peak of the fighting occurred between March 2003 and June 2004. Except for the WHO study, the studies reviewed covered this peak period and beyond, with the exception of Coebergh (began in April 2003) and CRED (began in September 2003). The GAO report provides references and Internet links to the studies.

The Verdict

The GAO panel concluded: “Although none of the death estimates was consistently considered accurate or methodologically strong, the experts we consulted rated some of the estimates more highly than others. Overall,

FIGURE 1



Source: GAO based on a map from State’s Humanitarian Information Unit and Map Resources. *Locations of damaged and destroyed villages, and of camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), in Darfur, as of February 2005. The region’s population was approximately 6.5 million in 2003 (of 40 million nationally), at the onset of strife instigated by British-inspired networks. By 2005, some 2.5 million Darfuri people were dislocated, with many tens of thousands dead. The GAO exposed the exaggerated estimates in its November 2006 review (GAO-07-24).*

the experts expressed the highest level of confidence in CRED’s estimates and slightly lower levels of confidence in State’s and the WHO’s estimates. They expressed the lowest level of confidence in the three estimates that report the highest number of deaths, citing multiple shortcomings, such as a reliance on unrealistic assumptions about populations’ level of risk over periods of time.”

The GAO panel added, “Two authors of other estimates also concluded that the CRED estimates were likely to be more reliable and more scientific than other

Darfur death estimates, including their own.”

The panel faulted the Reeves, Hagan, and Coebergh studies for their substantial reliance on the survey by the Atrocities Documentation Team (ADT), a team assembled by the Department of State and USAID, and including members of the Coalition for International Justice. The ADT worked exclusively in camps for displaced persons in Chad. The ADT questionnaire was not designed to determine mortality rates. The GAO panel states, “because the survey’s intended purpose was to document levels and types of victimization, the estimates [by Coebergh, Hagan, and Reeves] should not have extrapolated the survey findings to a broader population or time period in order to estimate total deaths.” Moreover, “many experts thought that each of the three estimates relied on too few data points extrapolated to an excessive degree.”

As for objectivity, the GAO report states, “Most experts rated the level of objectivity of the three estimates as low, particularly those by Drs. Coebergh and Reeves. The experts thought that the estimates were more characteristic of advocacy or journalistic material than objective analysis.” Coebergh even told the panel that his estimate was meant as “a political statement.”

The CRED studies estimated total deaths at 157,820 and subtracted an estimated 26,760 baseline deaths (deaths which would occur in a non-conflict situation), resulting in 131,060 deaths from violence, disease, and malnutrition, arising from the fighting through June 2005. The CRED figure would be somewhat higher if CRED had been able to evaluate deaths for March through August 2003. The State Department estimated deaths as falling in a range from 98,000 to 181,000. Its estimate of baseline deaths was 35,000, giving a range of 63,000 to 146,000 deaths from the fighting.

After the GAO published its findings in November 2006, there could be no excuse for citing the high numbers of Reeves, Hagan, and Coebergh.

The more reliable figures still show a horrendous loss of life in a country of 40 million people. But genocide? Hardly. How many bitter conflicts on the same scale, and with similar profiles, have been fought around the world in the past 100 years? How many were called genocide?

Rice’s ‘Ongoing’ Genocide

Rice’s claim, in January 2009, of “ongoing” genocide in Darfur, is evidently only a statement of her malign intentions, since it bears no relationship to the

conflict in Darfur. After June 2004, the level of fighting declined sharply and has remained low, as indicated in the following news items:

- The UN Secretary General’s envoy to Sudan at the time, Jan Pronk, stated in April 2006, that 100 people were dying per month on average because of the conflict. On Sept. 22, 2006, Pronk said that, “In 2005 the malnutrition and mortality figures decreased drastically,” thanks in part to aid operations.

- UNICEF reported, toward the end of 2006, that mortality rates in Darfur had dropped “for the third year running,” and that malnutrition rates had fallen under the emergency threshold. The WHO emergency threshold is one death per day per 10,000.

- British Darfur expert Alex de Waal wrote on his blog on Aug. 18, 2007, in reference to deaths since the end of 2005, “The data for the displaced populations indicate a pattern, . . . of crude death rates at normal levels, albeit with occasional bumps. . . .” Concerning violent deaths (mostly of non-displaced populations), he added, “Since the end of the major offensives in 2004, reports of violent deaths are compiled by the UN on a regular basis, though not published. There are peaks and lulls but the reports—which cover all significant incidents—indicate between 6,000 and 7,000 fatalities over the last two and a half years.”

More recently, Andrew Natsios, President George W. Bush’s special envoy to Sudan, in a March 23, 2009 article in *Foreign Affairs*, also indicated that there is no ongoing genocide. He refers to the claim made by Luis Moreno-Ocampo, chief prosecutor of the ICC, in a Yale University lecture on Feb. 6, 2009, that 5,000 war-related deaths are occurring each month. Natsios cited the report of the Genocide Intervention Network, that, in all of 2008, about 1,500 people were killed in Darfur, 500 of them Arabs killed by other Arabs.

Tim Carney, the last U.S. Ambassador to Khartoum, did not speak of genocide in testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Feb. 12. He proposed that the United States normalize relations with Sudan.

David Shinn, former U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia and, like Carney, an expert on the region, told a subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee March 12 that the term “genocide” was “inaccurate” and “counterproductive.” Rep. Steven Rothman (D-N.J.) took issue with Shinn, asking, “What difference does it make? Does anyone care? What are the benefits of saying this?” Shinn replied, “Simple honesty.” It was an exchange that Susan Rice might well contemplate.