

Rescue Darfur Now
By John McCain and Bob Dole
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In 1995, the writing was on the wall. The conflict in Bosnia was escalating. Tens of thousands of civilians had been driven from their homes and were trapped in places the United Nations had designated as "safe areas," including Srebrenica. Only a few hundred poorly equipped U.N. peacekeepers stood between those civilians and Bosnian Serb forces. The Serbs had signaled their defiance of the United Nations, their disdain for diplomatic overtures and their determination to advance on the safe areas and finish the job of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. All the makings of a massacre were present, and, before the eyes of the world, that is what unfolded. Eight thousand Bosnian Muslims were systematically killed at Srebrenica, and history has judged severely those policymakers who failed to heed the warning signs of mass murder.

As advocates of military action in Bosnia, we will never forget those terrible days. We remember that when the United States and its allies did finally act, military intervention saved countless lives. And all of us pledged anew that, should such a situation again unfold, we would do things very differently.

Today, the Darfur region of Sudan faces its own Srebrenica moment.

The scale of human destruction thus far in Sudan has been staggering. Already, more than 200,000 civilians have been killed, with perhaps 2.5 million forced into squalid camps. This catastrophe is the result of a directed slaughter perpetrated by the Sudanese government and allied Janjaweed militias.

Faced with its moral responsibility to act, the U.N. Security Council has adopted a resolution that would replace a courageous but inadequate African Union force with a much larger U.N. force empowered to protect civilians. Last week, the Sudanese government not only rejected the resolution but demanded that the African Union withdraw from the country, leaving civilians vulnerable. Meanwhile, government forces have launched a major offensive in Darfur to finish off any rebel forces there, pushing tens of thousands more civilians into the camps.

As with Srebrenica in 1995, the potential for further mass killing in Darfur today is plain for all to see. All the warnings have been issued, including one from the United Nations that the coming weeks may see "a man-made catastrophe of an unprecedented scale." What remains unclear is only whether the world has the will to impose an outcome on Sudan different from that which unfolded so tragically in Bosnia. Make no mistake: At some point we will step in to help victims in Darfur and police an eventual settlement. The question is whether the United States and other nations will act now to prevent a tragedy, or merely express sorrow and act later to deal with its aftermath.

Urgent action is required in the coming hours and days.

First, the United States should reject out of hand Khartoum's demand that the African Union force leave and should insist that it stay, with broad international support, until the introduction of a robust U.N. force in accordance with Security Council Resolution 1706.

Second, the United States should call on the European Union to impose financial sanctions against the Sudanese leadership and to pursue the immediate imposition of similar sanctions by the U.N. Security Council.

Third, NATO should immediately establish and enforce a no-fly zone over Darfur to ensure that Khartoum ends its offensive military flights and bombing raids, as the Security Council has already demanded.

Fourth, the United States should intensify efforts to persuade U.N. members to commit troops and funds for the U.N. force in Darfur, and it should develop plans for U.S. logistical support. The administration should push the United Nations to draw up firm plans for the entrance of a robust force into Darfur and contingency plans for the force to enter without Sudanese consent.

Fifth, U.S. and allied intelligence assets, including satellite technology, should be dedicated to record any atrocities that occur in Darfur so that future prosecutions can take place. We should publicly remind Khartoum that the International Criminal Court has jurisdiction to prosecute war crimes in Darfur and that Sudanese leaders will be held personally accountable for attacks on civilians.

Finally, the United States should increase pressure on countries friendly to Khartoum -- and particularly our allies in the Arab League -- to abandon their support for Sudan's refusal to accept the U.N. force.

Some of these steps would be dramatic and difficult. But the circumstances imposed on the people of Darfur are likewise dramatic and difficult. And so would be the consequences of inaction: a humanitarian disaster that the world will in any case have to address; a massive and possibly permanent population of refugees dependent on international support; a conflict spreading to neighboring countries with prospects for settlement even more remote; and a permanent stain on our conscience.

Throughout the world, people of conscience were shocked by and ashamed of our failure to stop the genocide in Bosnia and Rwanda. We must not repeat these mistakes. In Darfur, the moment of truth is now.

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