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Back in September 2004, then Secretary of State Colin Powel declared that Sudan was involved in the ongoing genocide in Darfur. Move forward a few months, to the 14th of April this year when Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick was sent to Sudan. Hopes that he was there to to apply pressure on the Sudan government to halt its killing in Darfur seem unfounded. At a press conference there Zoellick greatly underestimated the number of dead in Darfur and actually refused to endorse Powell's description of genocide.

This undoubtedly shows that the Bush Junta has a new perspective on Sudan and, as a consequence, its previous crimes are being downplayed to ensure that there is no attempt at humanitarian intervention any time soon. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that the White House wants to have a recently passed Darfur

Accountability Act stricken from the Iraq-Afghanistan emergency supplemental appropriations bill it is party of.

Like Rumsfeld and Saddam, Zoellick was more than happy to meet with First Vice President Ali Osman Taha, the man primarily responsible for the Darfur policy.

So why the policy shift? Simple, the Sudan government is helping the US in its imperial interests. The Bush Junta has forged a close intelligence partnership with the regime which once welcomed Osama bin Laden there. In exchange, the Sudanese government wants to be removed from the list of state sponsors of terrorism and wants Washington to lift long-standing economic sanctions barring most trade between the two countries. The collaboration is, unsurprisingly, not been widely unpublicised.

Then there is the oil. Yes, just as the Sudanese government's representatives visited Washington for high-level "consultations" with the CIA, it announced that "abundant" oil reserves have been found in Darfur. It also happens that China is at the head of Sudan's burgeoning oil industry and its companies are securing concessions in choice fields (It has invested more than \$15 billion in Sudanese oil through the China National Petroleum Corp, a state-owned monolith). US corporations will want to get access to those resources (American investment in Sudan was officially banned in 1997). Moreover, the US state has a real interest limiting Chinese influence as China could become the main global competitor in the years to come.

Is it surprising that the Bush Junta has changed its tune?

Obviously committing genocide is not really that important for the Bush Junta. Nor is the fact that Sudan is run by an authoritarian regime whose ruling military junta took power in 1989. The fact that Sudan continues to come under harsh international criticism for human rights violations is also not considered relevant. As is the fact that the Sudanese government was on the most recent US list of state sponsors of terrorism.

Why should it? It hasn't before. Why should all that matter when the regime has been providing access its resources and sharing intelligence data with the United States? Can we expect the US to become Sudan's defender at the UN rather than China, fighting off calls for sanctions and protest resolutions just as they did for Iraq in the 1980s?

The message is clear, help the US in its activities and you can kill as many people as you like. Indeed, we may even sell you the arms to do it. Just like we did with Saddam in the 1980s. So much for Bush's rhetoric about "freedom."