

Ramblings

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A Coalition of Conscience Is Moving the Issue of Suffering in Sudan to the Forefront of Attention

During the Cold War, there were often idealistic liberals and conservatives who focused attention upon the barbarity of the Soviet system and its denial of basic human rights. Others—mainstream members of both parties—were more interested in doing business, as they are today with regard to Communist China.

Now, this same coalition of conscience is emerging on the issue of suffering, religious persecution and slavery in Sudan.

In February, more than forty activists—evangelical Christians, a rabbi, a black radio talk show host and aides to conservative senators—met in a congressional hearing room and called for U.S. intervention to help Sudan's largely Christian south in its civil war with a predominately Islamic government in the north.

Many who participated had personally traveled to Sudan to pay money to “redeem” southerners abducted by northern raiders and pressed into slavery. “I felt like someone put me in a time machine, like I was in a scene from ‘Roots,’” the radio host, Joe Madison, said of his visit. “I was literally torn apart.”

Although the fighting in Sudan has contributed to more than 2 million deaths from violence and hunger, no clear U.S. national interests are at stake. American companies have no large investment in Sudan, and it is far from U.S. bases. It appears to be the kind of place that President Bush and his advisers said they wanted to avoid during last year's election campaign, when they criticized the Clinton administration for undertaking “nation building” and failing to focus on the “big” foreign policy issues, such as Russia and China.

Yet the persecution of Christian and minority ethnic groups in southern Sudan has mobilized many parts of the Republican base, particularly evangelical Christians. They are urging steps such as tightening economic sanctions, sending a special envoy, arming southern forces or even declaring “no-fly” zones similar to those over Iraq, which would require U.S. military action.

The people who gathered in Washington in February reflected the diverse coalition. They included Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Virginia); liberal former Washington, D.C. delegate Walter Fauntroy; Rabbi David Saperstein of the Reform Judaism Social Action Center; and an aide to the Rev. Franklin Graham, son of the Rev. Bill Graham.

“To me this is a moral outrage,” said the younger Graham, who gave the invocation at Bush’s inauguration and whose organization, Samaritan’s Purse, runs a hospital in southern Sudan that has been bombed nine times. He said:

We should use our economic power to bring this (Sudanese) government down. We should use our political power to persuade them to change their policies. And, if need be, use the military option as a last resort.

The Bush administration is beginning to listen. In March, the White House political adviser Karl Rove met with Rabbi Saperstein, former education secretary William Bennett, prison evangelist Chuck Colson and others to discuss U.S. policy options for Sudan.

At the recent dedication of a cultural center at Catholic University in Washington, D.C., President Bush himself declared that,

We’re responsible to stand for human dignity and religious freedom wherever they are denied, from Cuba to China to southern Sudan.

House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Texas), who is not known for taking an activist role in foreign policy and opposed the NATO air war against Serbia and the deployment of U.S. troops to Bosnia, has recently expressed passionate concern about Sudan. “We have an interest in the Sudan—that’s who we are,” Armey declared. “The U.S. will not tolerate this kind of suffering and human affliction.”

Armey and other critics of the militant Islamic regime in Khartoum have accused its leaders of condoning slavery, indiscriminately bombing civilian and humanitarian targets, persecuting Christians and other religious minorities, and using the threat of starvation to coerce political opponents and non-Muslims to convert to Islam.

“The situation in Sudan is rapidly getting worse and must be seriously addressed before the scale of death and destruction increases,” Armey and other lawmakers wrote in a March 27 letter to President Bush, calling for the appointment of a high-level U.S. envoy to press for peace.

Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Virginia), who has long labored to raise interest in the subject, marvels at the new attention it is receiving. “The civil war has been going on for eighteen years, but now there’s growing awareness,” Wolf said. He attributed the change to several developments: the Sudanese government’s increased bombing of insurgents; the possibility that enhanced oil production in the south would give the regime more revenue; and a new focus on Sudan by the Bush administration.

Secretary of State Powell says that he will review U.S. policy toward Sudan. “There is perhaps no greater tragedy on the face of the earth,” he said.

Members of Congress and the administration are responding to pressure from grassroots groups for action.

Schools, organizations and even the National Association of Basketball Coaches have contributed money to purchase the freedom of slaves in Sudan. Catholic bishops and major evangelical groups have pushed for changes in U.S.

policy. A committee of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum has warned of possible genocide in Sudan.

The issue has brought together traditional antagonists such as Rep. Armev and members of the Congressional Black caucus, including Donald M. Payne (D-New Jersey) and Charles Rangel (D-New York). They recently launched a congressional caucus on Sudan. Their cooperation came after Rep. Armev met with Kweisi Mfume, president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored people (NAACP), to discuss tension between black groups and the Republican Party.

The goal of the new alliance is to make Sudan a pariah nation by using many of the same tactics that forced South Africa to end apartheid. The strategy ranges from stockholder divestment campaigns and closing off U.S. capital markets to companies helping Khartoum develop its newfound oil wealth, to street demonstrations and civil disobedience. "Slavery in Sudan is just as paramount a concern as apartheid was in South Africa," says the NAACP's Kweisi Mfume.

The Clinton administration, angry at Sudan's support of terrorists, isolated and bombed Khartoum but did little to try to end the war. The new Sudan coalition wants President Bush to spearhead an international peace effort, pressure the U.S. Security Council to intervene with sanctions or a peacekeeping force, and appoint a special envoy whom the Sudanese can't ignore, such as former Vice President Al Gore or former Secretary of State James Baker. They also want the administration to begin shipping food, medicine and other aid directly to the south.

While President Bush has shown little enthusiasm for involvement in regional conflicts lacking direct American interests, there are signs of White House attention to Sudan. The president has twice cited religious prosecution there and both Secretary Powell and White House political adviser Karl Rove have put Sudan on their agendas.

Emotional testimony at congressional hearings on chattel slavery in Sudan—which reduced Senator Jesse Helms (R-North Carolina), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, to tears—is fueling determination to end it. Tens of thousand of black southerners have been kidnapped in raids by government soldiers and their Arab militias and carried north into bondage. Western Christians groups, buying freedom at an average of \$35 a head, have repatriated some 42,000 captives.

Beyond slavery, there is new impetus to end the strife. The discovery in the past several years of some 2 billion barrels of oil reserves has dramatically escalated the conflict from a guerrilla brush war to a scorched-earth offensive. Most of the oil lies in the southern lands of the Dinka and Nuer, and the Khartoum government is brutally depopulating large areas around oil zones to protect them from possible rebel attacks.

It is reported that tens of thousands are being forced from their homes by aerial bombing and strafing, and by soldiers razing entire villages, destroying food stocks and committing atrocities. In and around the town of Bentiu, reports Amnesty International,

. . . male villagers were killed in mass executions; women and children were nailed to trees with iron spikes . . . soldiers slit the throats of children.

In February, an aid worker traveling south of Bentiu counted 23 destroyed villages and quotes survivors as saying that those who couldn't flee—the elderly, sick, and very young—were burned alive by troops.

Members of the Sudan coalition want President Bush to pressure Sudan's oil partners to suspend operations until there is a peace settlement. Citing the Clinton administration's inaction in the 1994 Rwandan genocide that claimed up to 600,000 lives, they view Sudan as a litmus test for the new administration's concern for religious persecution and human rights.

Nina Shea, a member of the U.S. commission on International Religious Freedom, states that,

Regardless of the importance of international business and trade, the fact that our national leaders continue to be haunted by past genocides underscores the salience of human rights and religious freedom to present-day American foreign policy. The debate on Sudan's genocide will continue and it will, by virtue of new legislation and a mobilized religious community, eventually force a new Sudan policy—one hopefully in time to save lives.

A “Euro Army” Is Seen as a Threat to NATO as Well as to the “Special Relationship” Between the U.S. and the U.K.

The Bush administration has given a tough warning that plans for a European Defense Force could undermine NATO and provoke a dangerous rift between America and its allies.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld told delegates to a conference in Munich in February that he was “a little worried” by proposals for a 60,000-strong European Rapid Reaction force by 2003. He said:

Actions that could reduce NATO's effectiveness by confusing duplication or perturbing the transatlantic link would not be positive.

In a letter to the London *Daily Telegraph*, senator Jesse Helms (R-NC), chairman of the Senate foreign relations committee, and Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR), chairman of the Senate's European affairs subcommittee, warned that the European Rapid Reaction force could destroy NATO and described the force as “a dangerous and divisive dynamic within NATO.”

The two senators also warn, in a coded attack on the French, that key players within the EU want to use the force, set up under the European Security and Defense Policy Initiative, as “a means by which Europe can check American power and influence within NATO.”

Previous efforts to split the NATO alliance during the latter days of the Cold War, were firmly blocked by Prime Minister Thatcher and President Reagan, the letter points out.

Among ESPD's most enthusiastic supporters is Russian President Vladimir Putin—who openly advocates NATO's abolition. We must not allow ESDP to accomplish what the Soviet Union failed to achieve: the division of Europe and the U.S.

Senators Helms and Smith said the EU-NATO links are “absolutely vital” to prevent “conflicting interests” from undermining transatlantic cooperation. They warn that Britain and America will rue the day they failed to ensure the links were maintained.

In December, the U.S. failed to lock the European Rapid Reaction force into NATO, leaving both organizations adrift and uncertain. French officials said the development of an autonomous European defense policy is unstoppable. “The train is already moving,” said one French official.

NATO is not on board. It is not the engine. It is not in the tender or even in the passenger department compartment. It is still on the platform.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair faces opposition criticism that the failure of the NATO negotiations gives further proof that his government's stewardship of the European defense initiative is leading to the breakup of NATO, the creation of a “Euro-Army,” and the end of the “special relationship” between American and British military forces and intelligence agencies.

According to conservative British commentator Peter Hitchens, author of the widely discussed, book *The Abolition of Britain*,

In the years since the end of the Cold War, Britain has attached her armed forces to American operations in the Gulf and the Balkans, to keep alive the idea of a “special relationship.” . . . Like most European bodies, this new army . . . will grow to its full power by slow degrees. Year by year it will become more important and obtain more control over the armed forces of all union members. Again, like many EU projects, it will be more significant for what it prevents than for what it permits. And the main thing that it will prevent is the maintenance of the transatlantic alliance between the world's two foremost rule-of-law democracies. A new world order really is in the making, but it is not necessarily one that will please Americans or increase the liberty and prosperity of mankind.

The Blair government, facing a barrage of Eurosceptic attacks, is at pains to say that nothing has changed, or will change, in the Euro-Atlantic order. British officials argue that NATO's European members are taking certain sensible steps to improve their firepower, as the Americans have urged them to do, and that NATO will continue to be Europe's main security club. Above all, they insist, NATO will retain its position as the main agency for military planning, even for European-only operations.

What the British Government argues and what reality is could be quite different, observers point out. *The Economist* puts it this way:

The language used by French officials could hardly be more different, although to make life easier for their British colleagues they avoid referring explicitly to a "European army." Whereas Britain sees 60,000 as the absolute maximum size of an expeditionary force, unlikely in practice to be reached, the French hint that it could well be larger. . . . the British (including NATO's secretary-general, Lord Robertson) present the EU as an occasional subcontractor to NATO. The French stress the "political control" and "strategic guidance" the Union would hope to exercise over the forces "at its disposal," even in operations involving some non-EU members. The British point out the difficulty of reaching by 2003 the goals laid out at a previous meeting in Helsinki. The French retort that, as early as this year, the Union will have begun to acquire a rapid-reaction capacity and the ability to engage in strategic assessment and planning.

Jeffrey Gedmin, co-chairman of the forthcoming American Enterprise Institute/Daily Telegraph conference: "Britain and America: A Strategic Dialogue," provides this assessment:

The new American toughness may start over European integration. Once upon a time, Strobe Talbott, Bill Clinton's deputy Secretary of State, fawned over the project. A "politically united Europe will be a stronger partner to advance our common goals," he recited. No, the Bush administration should not be expected to launch a campaign against European integration. Europeans will organize themselves as they see fit. But don't expect the new administration to stand by passively and uncritically when the transatlantic link appears to be in jeopardy. Hard bargaining is ahead.

With regard to the EU and NATO, Mr. Gedmin notes that,

The enthusiasm of EU-centric elites has been waning for NATO matters altogether in recent years. The EU is simply a far more fashionable and sexy topic for Europe's center-left in power. West Europeans of all stripes are ready to scream, moreover, in deference to Vladimir Putin: especially if the Baltic nations are included in NATO. . . . The Cold War is truly over. The threats are now different. So, too, is the nature of the transatlantic relationship. The Bush administration will grasp that the Europeans are in the midst of renegotiating their ties to Washington. But President Bush will be a tougher negotiating partner than his predecessor . . .

In Britain, many are expressing concern about the future of NATO and of ties with Washington. Sir John Weston, former British ambassador to the alliance, argues that plans for a new European defense force could lead to the breaking up of NATO as the main instrument of Western defense and security.

Sir John mounted a sharp attack early in January on the provisions in the EU Treaty drawn up in Nice in December for a European defense identity. He said the

defense provisions in the treaty were “excruciatingly bureaucratic” and it defied common sense for the EU to set up a complete set of military institutions in parallel with NATO.

Sir John, who was Britain’s ambassador to NATO from 1992-95, suggested a more ambitious interpretation of EU aims than simply the stated ones of occasional humanitarian, rescue and peacekeeping tasks. He asked:

Why else would one need a separate EU Military Staff Committee at Chiefs of Defense level, a fully fledged military staff organization, a strategic planning capability, a satellite center, an institute of security studies and a force catalogue currently listed in the documents as 100,000 strong with 400 combat aircraft and 100 vessels?

Sir John said it defied common sense that two separate multinational organizations—NATO and the EU task force—could flourish in Europe

. . . with a very high coincidence of common membership, each of them presiding simultaneously over the same European military manpower, assets and budget and each claiming responsibility for common security and defense policy on Europe. The present course, whether by collective sleepwalking or tacit collusion, leads inexorably to the progressive degrading and deconstruction of NATO as the main Western instrument of collective defense and security and to attenuation of the Washington Treaty as the main legal expression of transatlantic unity. Clever drafting and brave UK footnotes will not stem this tide.

Speaking to NATO defense ministers in Brussels in December, then Secretary of Defense William Cohen warned that NATO could become a “relic of the past” unless Europeans carry out pledges to improve their military capability and link their new intervention force firmly to the Western alliance. “There will be no EU caucus in NATO,” Cohen warned.

The Wall Street Journal noted that,

Mr. Cohen’s words were addressed to all Europe, but we suspect they were primarily intended as a warning to America’s friends in Britain. Up until last year, Britain had refused to participate in any plan it thought might threaten NATO or the Anglo-American relationship. That was Tony Blair’s view when he came to Downing street in 1997. But somewhere along the way, Mr. Blair decided that Britain could live with the French idea of a European force and still have its special relationship with Washington . . . he now has a special obligation to explain to the U.S. just how this thing is going to work.

As Britain prepares for an election, the question of whether a EU military force is compatible with the “special relationship” between the U.S. and the U.K. is likely to be a subject of heated debate.

Richard Wurmbrand: A Witness to the Horrors of the Twentieth Century and Those Who Continued to Look Away

Richard Wurmbrand, a Romanian Lutheran pastor whose determination to spread the word of God led to his being imprisoned for fourteen years and tortured by Communist authorities, died in February at the age of ninety-one.

He came to prominence in 1964 when he was ransomed from the Romanian government by a group of Norwegian Christians for \$10,000. Shortly thereafter, in 1966, he testified before the U.S. Senate Internal Security Subcommittee where this writer was then a young staff member. It became my responsibility to usher Wurmbrand around Washington and assist him in the preparation of his testimony. His impact upon me, and upon all who met him was profound.

Richard Wurmbrand's life made him a witness to the horrors of the twentieth century—and to those who continued to look away. He was born in 1901 to a Jewish family and converted to Christianity in 1936. In 1938, his part of Romania became part of the Soviet Union, only to be invaded by German troops in 1940. From then until 1943 most of its large Jewish population was deported, starved or massacred. Though under great threat themselves, Wurmbrand and his wife, Sabine, brought several Jewish children out of the ghetto and concealed them. Later, after Soviet armies occupied Romania, he was imprisoned by the Communists. While ill with typhus he was sentenced at a secret trial to twenty years imprisonment. He was beaten, bound and subjected to brainwashing.

Upon his arrival in the West, Wurmbrand was asked why he had been arrested by the Communists. His reply, even in the unfamiliar English tongue, was piercing:

This is a question that is put to you in the West. . . . With us the question is why somebody is not arrested. A colleague of mine was sentenced to seven years imprisonment because on Christmas Eve he preached that Jesus, being a babe, Herod wished to kill him, but his Holy Mother fled with him to Egypt. This was the charge: that he hoped that Nasser would be on the side of imperialists and therefore he mentioned Egypt.

When the Communists triumphed in Romania in 1945, they convened a meeting of Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and Orthodox clergymen. More than 4,000 attended and were told that Romanian Communism would be different from Russian Communism. "We will not persecute the church," the Communists said.

There was only one in that congress who protested and said the Communism can never change, that terror is an essential part of Communism . . .

according to Wurmbrand—himself. and for the crime of preaching the Gospel he spent fourteen years in prison, much of the time in solitary confinement. But he was not alone:

I met in prison all those who had praised Communism, all those who had collaborated with Communism, and they were treated just like me. They had been fools.

Upon reaching the West, Wurmbrand found it hard to understand why the churches called for “coexistence” with Communism and for “building bridges” between East and West. Addressing Western church leaders, he asked:

Why have you sat at banquets with our inquisitors? How is it that you have had friendship and fellowship with our inquisitors, and never with us?

It was his view that Christian leaders forget that there are two Romanias, two Bulgarias, two Soviet Unions,

. . . that of the oppressed and that of the oppressors. Most Western Christian contact appears to be with the oppressors of Christians and not with the Christians themselves.

This was borne out in a conversation Wurmbrand had with Eugene Carson Blake, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC). He told Dr. Blake of the conditions that Christians must endure in Communist countries, and Blake’s reply was that

I do not have to hear about conditions in Communist countries from refugees like you. I am in direct touch with the hierarchy.

This, Wurmbrand pointed out, is much like telling Jewish refugees from Nazism that there was no need to talk with them about conditions in Germany, because more accurate reports could be obtained by direct communication with the Nazis themselves.

In the January 1966 issue of the *International Review of Missions*, Page 23, published by the World Council of Churches, Wurmbrand found the following description of religious life in Romania:

The churches in Romania, both Orthodox and Protestant, are carrying out their work in an atmosphere of full religious liberty and very good ecumenical cooperation. . . . A large number of projects are being undertaken at the present time. Where necessary the Romanian Government provides financial aid, although the restored buildings remain the property of the churches and are used exclusively for religious functions.

Wurmbrand wrote the author, asking when the Bible had been published in Romania, where a Sunday school could be found or a seminary. He received no answer and commented that

If the man who wrote this has not taken thousands of dollars from the Romanian secret police, he deserves to be hanged for stupidity.

From October 26 to November 4, 1966 *Christianity Today* magazine, the National Association of Evangelicals, and Evangelist Billy Graham sponsored a World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin. Wurmbrand was invited to participate in this meeting, but the invitation was later withdrawn. The reason: he might direct

some critical comments at Communism, which would endanger “fellowship with Eastern churches.”

In a letter to Billy Graham, Wurmbrand dealt squarely with the issues. He noted that official Communist church representatives *always* speak about “political subjects” such as the war in Vietnam and colonialism but that they refuse to permit anti-Communists to say anything “political” at church meetings. This, of course, is done with the full approbation of Western church leaders. And what of

Billy Grahams behind the iron curtain? . . . You surely must have on your prayer list your colleagues, the Billy Grahams of the East who sit in prison or may already have died in prison for the only crime of having been evangelists. You surely know the names of Kuzyck, Prokofiev, Grunvald, Invanenko, Granny Shefchuk, Taisya Tkachenko, Ekaterine Velazoma, Balauta, Ghelbegehnu, Vacareanu and others in Romania. . . . How can a World Congress on Evangelism not speak about these martyrs of evangelism and give the due honor to their names? If we desire to evangelize the world, we have to plan at this congress in Berlin how best to oppose Communism and how to continue there secretly the evangelization of the peoples oppressed by the Bolsheviks.

When Wurmbrand returned to the U.S. in October 1966 he discovered that he was under attack from still another quarter. The president of the American Lutheran Church, the Rev. Frederick A. Schiotez, had distributed a letter (dated October 12, 1966) to his fellow pastors containing a number of blatant untruths. According to Wurmbrand the major one was that he was permitted to leave Romania because of intercession by the WCC on behalf of any Christian prisoners:

How could there be? The WCC itself is of the opinion that there is complete religious freedom in Romania.

American Lutherans were told not to invite Wurmbrand as a speaker because his view of Communism “lacks discernment.” The organization with which he was then affiliated, Underground Evangelism, was condemned by Schiotez for this reason:

Recently I have received two sixteen-page brochures from Underground Evangelism, each devoted largely to Pastor Wurmbrand. I note the brochure announces that the Rev. J. L. Bass is president of the organization and Mrs. Bass is secretary-treasurer. Personally, I have never been enthusiastic about religious organizations where members of the same family occupy two key control offices in the organization.

In 1967, Wurmbrand established Jesus to the Communist World (later Voice of the Martyrs), a bible-smuggling mission and anti-Communist organization based in California. He traveled around the world lecturing and preaching and published the book *Tortured for Christ*, his account of his suffering in Romaninan

Communist jails. It became an international best-seller and became the first of many books praising the Eastern European “heroes” of the faith and denouncing Communist persecution.

When he left Romania, Richard Wurmbrand was told by the Communists to “Preach Christ as much as you like,” but, they added menacingly, “don’t touch Communism.” This was the same message he received from Christian leaders in the West. It was the reaction to him of such diverse men as Eugene Carson Blake, Billy Graham and Frederick Schiotez. His shattering of their illusions about what Communism is really like produced the kind of reaction we often see when men resist as their illusions are besieged by reality.

In his testimony before the U.S. Senate, Wurmbrand uttered these words:

I am a very insignificant and a very little man. I have been in prison among the weak ones and the little ones, but I speak for a suffering country and for a suffering church and for the heroes and the saints of the twentieth century; we have had such saints in our prisons to which I did not dare to lift my eyes. . . . such men have been mocked and tortured in our country. And even if it would mean to go back to a Romanian prison, to be kidnapped by the Communists and going back and tortured again, I cannot be quiet. I owe it to those who suffered there.

When Richard Wurmbrand died in Whittier, California he was memorialized by lengthy news stories in such papers as *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Independent of London*—but not a word appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* or other major American papers. Just as his message was avoided during his life, so in death it has been overlooked as well.

After the execution of Romania’s Communist President Nicolae Ceausescu in 1989, Wurmbrand returned to preach in Romania, where he was welcomed as a hero. He was a hero, as well, to those Americans and men and women throughout the world who encountered him during his lifetime. He was a witness to the horrors of the twentieth century and did his best to alert the rest of us to the evil abroad in the world. Many continued to look away, but it is men such as Richard Wurmbrand not those who refused to confront the evil of their time who will be remembered kindly by history. Ω