

Obama's Empty Promises to Halt Genocide Leaves It to Us To Act

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Three months ago, in late March, the Obama Administration was toying with the idea of supporting the establishment of a humanitarian corridor in order to transport food to hundreds of thousands of people in the Nuba Mountains who are now facing imminent starvation. Unfortunately, “toying” is the *mot juste*. In other words, talk, talk, and more talk, along with indecisiveness and wavering, has lorded it over action. Indeed, thus far, *realpolitik* has won out yet again over the moral imperative to help our brothers and sisters in critical need.

Instead of acting on the Biblical injunction of being our brothers' (and sisters') keepers, the plight of the Nuba Mountains people has largely been swept under the proverbial rug. The result has been fatal, as an untold number of people have already starved to death.

Unlike the innocent in Syria who are being killed with bullets and tank shells, the Nuba Mountains people are facing a much quieter death – but one that is no less deadly. As the victims' muscles atrophy and their skin becomes frighteningly taut due to a lack of adequate nutrition, each movement of their body results in intense pain. Groaning and quietly weeping as they die a slow and excruciatingly painful death, all their family members can do is look on in sorrow and wonder who among them might be next in line for a similar death.

The Sudanese Government's (GoS) ongoing onslaught against the Nuba Mountains people -- constant aerial bombing, forced evacuation of hundreds of thousands from their villages and homes, and now the forced starvation of mothers, infants, children and elderly -- *has not gone unnoticed, just ignored*. Indeed, neither the international community nor the Obama Administration can claim, “We weren't aware of the tragedy,” as President Clinton did during the height of 1994 genocide in Rwanda.” In fact, the Obama Administration has been apprised time and again of the crisis by Congressman Frank Wolf (R-VA), various human rights organizations, and, indirectly, by the media, ranging from *The New York Times* (most notably *NY Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof), *The Washington Times* (most notably, Franklin Graham, Founder and Director of Samaritan's Purse), National Public Radio, and the PBS NewsHour.

Since the Obama Administration insists on doing nothing – while, ironically, touting itself as the first presidential administration in the history of the United States to take genocide seriously (“Last year in the first ever presidential directive on this challenge,” Obama said recently in announcing the establishment of the Atrocities Prevention Board, “I made it clear that preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States of America”), we, the citizens of the world who deeply care about the plight of the Nuba Mountains people, cannot, and must not, stand by and do nothing as generations in the past have in the face of genocide (i.e., the 1915-1919 Ottoman Turk genocide of the Armenians, the Holocaust, the 1975-1979 Khmer Rouge slaughter of their fellow Cambodians, the 1994 Hutu slaughter of the Tutsi in Rwanda, and the 1995 massacre of some 8,000 Muslim boys and men in Srebrenica).

Now is the time to stand up; *and if not now, when?* (It will be interesting to see if Ms. Samantha Power, President Obama's Special Assistant and Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights and Chair of the newly minted Atrocities Prevention Board, will step up and be counted in this regard. After all, she is the one who coined the term “Upstander” (which she defined as one who speaks out in the face of mass atrocities, thus avoiding being a bystander), and who has gotten a lot of mileage out of it as she's been praised by one anti-genocide group after another for having done so. We all know that it is much easier to talk the talk versus stepping up and walking the walk. If anyone should walk the walk, it is Ms. Power, an individual who vociferously criticized one U.S. president and presidential administration after another in her Pulitzer Prize winning book, *“The Problem from Hell”* (as well as a slew of editorials) for not stepping up when potential genocide was on the horizon. Now that she is in a position of power, one has to wonder why her voice has gone silent.)

Since private citizens do not have the wherewithal to use military force to establish a no fly zone over the Nuba Mountains to halt the attacks by the Antonovs and MIGs, the means to bomb the runways from which the bombers and MIGS take off from, or the forces needed to arrest Omar al Bashir and turn him over to the International Criminal Court, which has charged him with crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes due to the atrocities perpetrated in Darfur, we must take a different tact.

Among the options I believe we, citizens of the world, should consider (in no particular order, but solely with *an eye to demanding and seeing to it that effective action is carried out to save the Nuba Mountains people from certain death*) are as follows:

- Organize and commit *sustained* civil disobedience in front of the White House, U.S. State Department and/or the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum;
- Organize and conduct a *sustained* hunger strike in front of the White House, State Department and/or the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum;
- Commit daily acts of civil disobedience over a significantly sustained period of time in front of the Sudanese Embassy in Washington, D.C., blocking entrance into the embassy.
- Organize and drive five to ten lorries loaded with food and water from South Sudan into the Nuba Mountains, thus leading the way and hopefully prodding (cum embarrassing) the international community to follow suit.

If others have different and/or better ideas/approaches then they should suggest them.

I fully realize that each of the above options appear radical; however, for eleven long months not a single effort by human rights and various anti-genocide organizations has been effective in prodding, cajoling or embarrassing the Obama Administration or the UN into action (and here I do not necessarily mean military action by U.S. forces, but rather the Administration's application of pressure on the UN to act and to act decisively). Enough is enough! This is not a game! Tens of thousands of people's lives are at risk.

Over the past forty years or so, Holocaust survivors, scholars of the Holocaust and genocide, and educators have spoken and written at length about those individuals who failed to speak out on the behalf of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis, as well as those who did (such as the Righteous Gentiles who have long been honored by the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem). Those same speakers, authors, and educators have frequently encouraged, prodded, and cajoled all those who live in free societies to take a stand when others are brutally being denied their basic rights and/or face potential, if not actual, crimes against humanity and genocide. In making such speeches and writing such papers among the most common admonitions issued are "Never Again," and "Remember!"

In light of the silence of the world in the face of the imminent starvation of the Nuba Mountains people today, one has to wonder: are such speeches, such articles and books, such lessons in schools, all for naught? Are such admonitions meaningless? Are such words simply uttered, and accepted by those who hear and read them, something that simply sounds good in the moment but then are quickly forgotten? Is such counsel only going to be acted upon when it suits the powers that be that action is in their interests (and, if it is not, then the hell with those thousands, tens thousand and millions or more who are facing imminent death)?

One has to really wonder what lessons the world – leaders and ordinary citizens alike – has really learned from the Holocaust. Even those who espouse such heartfelt sentiments/words/phrases are among those who look away when such tragedies break out -- and here I mean Holocaust survivors, survivors of other genocides, scholars, and educators at all levels. And if they don't look away, then far too often they stand slack jawed and silent. Neither is admirable; and, in fact, both are unconscionable.

Not one to suggest that others should pursue an avenue I am not willing to undertake, I shall place my name at the top of the list to take part in any of the above actions that gain traction.

Those willing to step up and be counted and thus avoid the tag of being a bystander in the face of certain crimes against humanity and potential genocide by attrition can contact me at samstertotten@gmail.com

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