

What if... Kerry went on a hunger strike for Darfur

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Senator Kerry Continues Hunger Strike; Security Council Unlikely to Move Before Planned Meeting; Conditions in Darfur Deteriorate

AP wire: October 12, 2004

Senator John Kerry's dramatic hunger strike, now in its 13th day, appeared to be having little effect on the situation in Darfur. Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir brushed aside questions during a press conference restricted to local Sudanese media. "Mr. Kerry should not interfere in the internal affairs of Sudan, and I will not interfere in his affairs," President Bashir declared, continuing that, "People in Sudan experience hunger every day, so we do not know what Mr. Kerry is trying to achieve." President Bush, meanwhile, continued to maintain that foreign policy towards Sudan was under continuous review, and that while he was in full agreement with the general goals of Senator Kerry's hunger strike, the issue in Sudan was "more complicated" than Mr. Kerry's position. Mr. Bush clarified his comments of the previous day, saying that his remark to a reporter from the Washington Post that "America can't get sucked into another quagmire," did not mean that the situation in Iraq was a quagmire. "We are on track to elections in Iraq," President Bush said, and "the situation in Darfur is improving."

The Senator appeared to be in good health, and his physician issued a press release yesterday afternoon saying that at the moment there appeared to be no complications from the strike. The Senator has been restricting himself to water and juice. Doctors suggested that the Senator could continue with few long term adverse health effects for approximately ten more days. Beyond that, the Senator would risk permanent damage to vital organs. Tropical Storm Louise, meanwhile, veered away from its earlier path towards Coral Gables, and officials at the University of Florida stated that they would respect Mr. Kerry's decision to remain on the stage where he began his strike at the end of the first Presidential debate.

The Security Council did not advance its planned meeting of October 20 to consider the situation in Darfur. Jan Pronk, the United Nations secretary general's special representative for Sudan, cast doubt yesterday on an earlier suggestion by an official from the office of the U.N. Secretary General that the Security Council would pass a resolution authorizing a 15,000 member African Union peacekeeping force to intervene under United Nations authority. Instead, Mr. Pronk said, the Security Council would "urge" member states to support the African Union initiative. The United States has said that it would support the more forceful resolution, while China appears to prefer the weaker one. African Union officials, meeting late into the night, were not able to confirm that the organization would send a peacekeeping force without U.N. authorization and support.

Analysts continued to debate whether Mr. Kerry's hunger strike could achieve the three conditions Mr. Kerry set for ending the strike: a substantial peacekeeping and human rights monitoring force to begin deployment by the end of October, with or without United Nations authorization; \$500 million dollars committed to ensure the survival of the estimated 2 million displaced persons through the coming year; and establishment of an International Criminal Tribunal for Sudan. Fox News commentator Bill O'Reilly opined that, "Mr. Kerry's poll numbers were falling before the debate, and he lost the debate, and this cheap stunt will not get him the Presidency." O'Reilly urged action against Sudanese officials, but said that the President should not be pressured by Mr. Kerry. Democratic pollster Stan Greenberg noted that Mr. Kerry's support among women and younger voters had strengthened, with little change among adult white males. "They're taking a wait-and-see approach," Mr. Greenberg said. He added that a slight majority of voters were unable to locate Darfur as a region of Sudan, despite Mr. Kerry's strike.

The Senator's wife, Theresa Heinz Kerry, today announced that Bill Gates had agreed to match her promise to devote \$50 million from her personal fortune to an international effort for the people of Darfur. Mr. Gates's office could not confirm or deny the announcement. A spokesman for the White House noted that the U.S. had already committed almost \$250 million for the humanitarian emergency in Darfur.

Asked by a reporter from CNBC whether Mr. Kerry's was not cynically using the plight of Darfur to advance his own chances to secure the Presidency, Mr. Kerry told a story, as he has each day since the strike began, of the death of a particular child in one of the refugee camps. He said that deaths of 870 children had been recorded in the previous week, according to reports from camp administrators, up from 674 the previous week. "Amina Hassa, who died yesterday from complications related to severe malnutrition, is just one of those children. She was just three years old. This hunger strike isn't about me," Mr. Kerry asserted, "But about how we respond to the unnecessary and completely preventable deaths of children on a massive scale."

