

AFRICA IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE, FALL 2008 POLICY MEMO ASSIGNMENT

From A.C LeVan's course: [Africa in Comparative Perspective](#) (SIS 676 – 008/SIS 496), American University

You just graduated from the School of International Service and a new administration has taken over in Washington. You have an exciting new job and you've been asked to write a short policy memorandum for your new employer about Darfur. The memo should address the following points:

- A parsimonious summary (one short paragraph) of the memorandum's main points.
- Background on the conflict and its causes.
- An evaluation of the international community's role and projections regarding different future scenarios of the conflict.
- An assessment of your employer's current position and recommendations for action. Keep in mind that a variety of scenarios for intervention, diplomacy, and applying pressure exist. Good recommendations will also anticipate likely responses from other actors. For example, DOD and State would want to think through reactions from congress and key foreign allies.

Identify other students in the class who are working on the same topic. I encourage you to use the discussion groups on Blackboard to help you think through your organization's perspective. This role play exercise works best if your team formulates an effective division of labor. You can choose any employer from the list below. You will be graded individually, but do coordinate your choice with your teammates and prepare for our class simulation carefully. Outside research is encouraged, although you should be able to respond using the required readings and a little bit of imagination.

Department of State – Your new boss is the Secretary of State. What should U.S. foreign policy be towards the country? How do you respond to criticisms that you are not doing enough? Should you try to increase or decrease the public visibility of your current strategy? How is your position different from your predecessor?

African Union – African intervention in Darfur might signal a change in post-independence assumptions about the sanctity of "domestic" affairs. Will you nuance your position or are Africans in the midst of a paradigm shift? What international support is necessary for resolving the conflict? Is there any role for the UN?

Department of Defense – Your new boss, the Secretary, is concerned about strain on troops, but she also wants to anticipate conflagrations in Africa that may threaten US interests or regional stability. What is really at stake?

Public relations firm – You were just hired by a public relations firm representing the government of Sudan. You are being paid lots of money to "set the record straight" for Americans who misunderstand the nature of the problems facing the country.

Coalition of human rights organizations – The international community and the United States, for their lack of action, may be culpable in the first major crimes against humanity of the 21st Century. Does the violence qualify as genocide? Does it matter? What is your recommended national and international plan of action?

Writing a good policy memo requires a different style of writing compared to an essay. Your boss is extremely busy so you need to convey as much relevant and useful information in as little space as possible. Therefore you have resolved to limit yourself to three, single-spaced pages. You should structure the memo by summarizing the situation, outlining your employer's perspective on the issue, and making a few actionable recommendations. Use complete sentences but focus on efficiency – do not simply insert these headings into a conventional essay format.

(This is worth 20% of course grade and is due on the date specified on the syllabus.)

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