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# Darfur activism had negative consequences: report

(Reuters) - Activists concerned about the situation in Darfur detracted attention and aid from other African conflicts, a U.S.-based foundation said Wednesday.

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Darfur's rebellion, which sparked the world's largest aid operation and the largest U.N.-funded peacekeeping mission, has attracted unprecedented attention for an African conflict.

"There is no doubt that American activists were able to bring attention to the conflict in Darfur," a report by the U.S.-based Cato Institute said.

"Even so, their efforts had negative consequences ... the diversion of public attention from other wars of great scale and longevity," it said, citing Democratic Republic of Congo.

Darfur activists were not immediately available to comment.

The report said activist groups failed to recognize the change in the scale and nature of Darfur's conflict, saying genocide was ongoing while fighting had largely subsided since the 2003-2004 height of the counter-insurgency, which impacted on U.S. policy and took the focus off a key peace process.

"They helped shift U.S. diplomatic emphasis away from the peacemaking process and from atrocities committed by rebel groups," the report added.

Mostly non-Arab rebels took up arms in early 2003 accusing Khartoum of neglecting the remote region. The United Nations estimates 300,000 people died in the ensuing humanitarian crisis after some 2 million Darfuris fled the fighting.

Darfur has become anarchic with rebel splits, pro-government militias disillusioned with Khartoum and weapons available allowing attackers, kidnappers and bandits to enjoy almost complete impunity due to a breakdown in law and order.

The Cato report argues that was because of a lack of a comprehensive peace deal, and blamed lobbyists for diverting Washington's focus away from peace talks and toward sending in international peacekeepers.

A joint U.N.-African Union peacekeeping mission, a compromise after Khartoum rejected the U.N. Security Council resolution authorizing a full U.N. takeover of faltering African Union troops in Darfur, began to deploy on December 31, 2007. Today the force is almost at 80 percent strength.

"The increase of international troops in Darfur did not reduce the problem of banditry or improve

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access to the affected population," the report said, adding:

"In fact humanitarian access to affected areas worsened after the United Nations began to deploy troops."

Peace talks in Qatar are stalled as the most militarily powerful Darfur rebel Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) withdrew, citing continuous government bombardment of its areas.

(Reporting by [Opheera McDoom](#))

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