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The Changing Nature of Peace Keeping in Africa

Author; *Joseph Kioi Mbugua,*

International Peace Support Training Centre

Corresponding Author; *Joseph Kioi Mbugua*

Abstract

This study surveys evolution of peace keeping at the global level and in Africa and the changing conflict dynamics in the continent. A number of trends have been identified on the changing nature of peace keeping in Africa. More and more troop contributions are coming from Africa. Africa still remains the largest recipient of UN troop contributions and there is a growing tendency of United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU) collaboration in peacekeeping. Some of the AU missions discussed are AU Mission in Burundi (AMIB), AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS), AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and missions established by the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS). There are lessons to be drawn from past missions that can inform current and future Peace Support Operations (PSO) in Africa. The new missions are predominantly dealing with intra state conflicts and their mandates has expanded to include protection of civilians and vulnerable groups and support state stabilization through post conflict peace building, support for elections and other governance issues. The changing dynamics of peace keeping is also noted in the interpretation of the principles of peace keeping whereby consent of the government may be overlooked in cases of gross human rights violations and the limited and targeted use of illegal armed groups Africa still dominates the global conflicts hot points. The actors in these conflicts have also increased and they keep on mutating where there is a thin line between combatants and civilians, thereby posing significant challenges to

peacekeeping missions. Transnational terrorism such as posed by Al Shabaab in Somalia has also precipitated new approaches. The rampant abuse of human rights and severe humanitarian crises pose challenges to missions that may not be well prepared to handle such cases. Western led peacekeeping operations in Africa have also added a new dimension as witnessed in Libya, Central Africa Republic and Mali. Scanning the peacekeeping horizon, the study identifies continuing evolution of peacekeeping determined by three parameters, global economic condition, regional organizations contributions and mediated interventions bringing a multiplicity of actors together.

Introduction and Background

Rich documentary evidence exists within the annals of the United Nations (UN) to show the history of peacekeeping in the world since 1948, when the first peace keeping operation was mounted to deal with the Arab-Israeli crisis. More missions followed and increased in the post-cold war period. Thus, 69 peacekeeping operations have taken place since then. In the period following the Iraq-Kuwait war in 1990, more than 60 peacekeeping missions have been dispatched, 40 of which have been to Africa (UN, 2014).

As at September 2014, 16 UN peacekeeping missions were in operation, of which 9 are in Africa. Africa today has the largest concentration of peacekeeping missions on the globe and it also hosts the largest troop and police contributing countries such as Ethiopia (6,528), Rwanda (4,709), Nigeria (4,619), Ghana (2,992) and Senegal (2,967); that are the top five peacekeeping staff contributors among the African states UN, (2014). The critical aspect of this escalation however has been the rapidly changing nature of peace keeping in the world generally, and Africa in particular.

Most notable has been a growing trend of involving regional organizations such as the African Union (AU) in conflict resolution mechanisms.

The rationale for the participation of regional organizations in peacekeeping can be traced in AU's 'try Africa first' policy and Article 52 of the UN Charter, which states that local disputes should be settled regionally before referral to the global body. This is further reinforced by Article 53 of the Charter, which states that the Security Council can utilize regional arrangements and agencies to enforce and maintain peace and security under its authority. Moreover, regional organizations' members are more willing to provide staff for peacekeeping missions owing to their proximity and likelihood of suffering the negative effects of conflict, and because their troops and non-military staff are more 'culturally sensitive' during operations.

Consequently, regions and countries in Africa are now engaged in organizing and deploying their own peacekeeping missions. The most known operations include the

African Union Mission in Burundi (AMIB) in 2003, African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) from 2004 to 2007 and African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) from 2007 till present. Kenya following the re-hatting of its troops into AMISOM also has a significant number of troops thereby joining the ranks of top troop contributing countries. The Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS) has from time to time dispatched its own missions to sister states to deal with emerging conflict challenges, Barigabek, (2008).

Most Regional arrangements or Multinational models of peacekeeping reflect the changing socio-political and economic conflict context and dynamics. The UN and other partners have supported African peacekeeping, through funding and 'Hybrid' missions due to AU and Regional organization resources constraint. In order for regional mechanisms to strategically direct their missions, financial independence and sustainability will be required as missions evolve. Peacekeeping interventions can sometimes lead to conflicts among participating states themselves, states and organizations, and even among organizations as the current disagreement between Rwanda and Tanzania over the UN operation against Force Démocratique pour la Libération du Rwanda (FDLR) in eastern DRC indicate.

Regional peacekeeping regimes require the on-going development of norms and procedures based on best practices. Both horizontal and vertical cooperation has impacted peacekeeping initiatives. The successes and failures of past operations have affected the current peace keeping work of ECOWAS, IGAD and South African Development Community (SADC) operations and intervention.

Responsibilities for peacekeeping missions have also changed and taken on added dimensions. They no longer just keep peace, but they also engage in other aspects such as demobilization, reintegration and even helping nations organize and hold elections. Further, peacekeeping is increasingly being used to deal with intra-rather than interstate conflicts. This has added responsibilities that even the normal mandates of UN in peacekeeping did not foresee. The complexity of peace keeping in intra-state circumstances has challenged the extent to which peacekeepers can use force, beyond self-defence, Bruijne and Bloemendaal (2008).

In the light of this background, Africa is itself a perfect demonstration of the changing character of peacekeeping on the continent and globally. This illustrates the challenges posed to the normative principles of peacekeeping, which exist up to date within the definitions of the UN.

The Normative Principles of Peacekeeping and the Challenge they face in Africa the four pillars of peacekeeping in the world as articulated by the UN still stand today though under serious challenges. The foremost of these principles of peacekeeping is the consent of parties to dialogue and requirement to seek consensus and peace to a

conflict; second is the non-use of force except in self-defence; third is the principle of impartiality.

However, the mandate to engage in peacekeeping is the pillar that determines the operations of the missions as well as the application of these principles in any mission. The mandate itself is determined by the nature of the conflict in any given area Neethling, (2008).

In Africa and the world in general, there is little doubt that these principles that have underlain peace operations for a long time have themselves faced serious challenges. These challenges mainly come from the changing environment of conflict on the African continent and the evolving approaches put in place by various players to deal with the conflicts Neethling, (1998); Brahimi, (2000). The response to this changing conflict environment has led to pronounced disagreements on how to negotiate and implement peace in Africa, and even on how to implement the principles themselves. Sometimes the implementation of the norms themselves has generated suspicions between the peacekeeping initiatives from global partners and the African players. The changing terrain of conflicts on the African continent demonstrates well the critical challenge that the generic model and principle of peacekeeping in the world face.

The Nature of Conflict on the African Continent

There are about sixty-one countries around the world having some form of armed conflict although the levels and nature vary. Of these twenty-four are in Africa alone. The countries in conflict have experienced many difficulties during the period of war. This includes deaths of civilians and soldiers by way of combat, diseases, and increased crime rate among others. For example, the Sudan conflict is estimated to have resulted in the deaths of about 2 million people between 1983 and 2002. The economies of the countries have also been left worse off after the war making life more difficult for the civilians. Moreover, displacement of populations has been experienced resulting in regional dimensions to the conflicts, Hoeffler, (2008).

The conflicts on the continent have taken a characteristic of their own challenging the very normative principles of the UN. First, these conflicts are intra rather than interstate in nature. This is demonstrated by the conflicts in Somalia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Libya, the DRC Congo, and South Sudan where warring parties are either tribal groupings or clans driven by a variety of underlying problems especially structural ones.

Secondly, the players in these conflicts have also changed in type and composition. They are not necessarily armed combatants operating within the confines of conventional wars. Such players now include rebel groups, ethnic factions, terrorists

and criminal gangs, as is the case with piracy on the coast of Somalia. Each of these groups has its own reasons for engaging in conflict. Some of them claim a course, while other conflicts could be religiously motivated. Others could be driven by either economic or religious extremism. Others are driven by the desire to control national resources especially when they are of a lucrative nature.

This is the case with oil in South Sudan and diamonds in Sierra Leone. The implication here to peacekeeping is that identification and definition of both actors/players and interests to a conflict is a difficult task. This is shown, for example, by the number of Somali peace negotiations, which are eventually dishonoured, and mediators have to deal with a new crop of aggrieved parties time and time again.

Thirdly the nature of conflict in Africa has also taken a dimension where there is deliberate targeting of the civilian populations. This is a worrying development because it leads to extreme suffering of civilians who are subjected to various violations of their human rights, including torture, forceful displacement, rape, slavery and decapitation. This is well demonstrated in the DRC and Darfur, where extreme violence and abuse of the human rights of women and children are rampant. This is often a result of absence of a legal authority or weak governance structures and the control of society by combatant gangs and rebels who have no recourse to law and order. The current conflicts in Central African Republic (CAR) and Somalia, and recently in South Sudan are other cases in point, Warner, Lesley, A. (2014)

Beyond the conflicts, communities are also being ravaged by natural catastrophes, which have heightened human insecurity. In Somalia for instance the UN, in July 2014, estimated that at least 350,000 people were at risk of starvation for the next three years owing to the drought being experienced in the country. On the other hand the Ebola Viral Disease (EVD) has been ravaging West African countries since the first case was reported in March 2014 in Sierra Leone, spreading to Guinea and Liberia. As at August 2014, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated the cumulative number of cases attributed to EVD in the three countries to stand at 3069 including 1512 deaths. It is also reported that at least 20,000 people are at risk if control methods are not effectively administered as there lacks a reliable and tested cure. This poses a challenge to peacekeeping, as human security seems to become a trigger to further fuelling conflict.

The security sector is thus tasked with the mandate of ensuring that such concerns are addressed. This is exemplified in the case of Liberia, which has had to use the security forces to contain the EVD.

The challenge therein has been whether security forces are well trained and equipped to handle such challenges outside the traditional peacekeeping roles.

Due to the changing nature of conflicts on the African continent, the traditional role of peacekeepers is also changing. Their role is no longer confined to separation of combatants and keeping them from engaging in battle. It now covers other humanitarian issues that include, the democratization of countries undergoing war and civil disorder, the management of national elections, protection of human rights, reconstruction and resettlement. This complexity of conflicts in Africa has led to reinterpretation of the UN principles of peace to the extent of allowing states or groups of nations to take their own initiatives to bring peace to warring parties, even when it seems to violate the salient UN principles of peacekeeping. In circumstances where governments target their own populations as was the case with Cote D'Ivoire and the CAR, the situation drew the intervention of countries such as France with a view to causing peace through protection of civilians.

The UN itself has given its mandate to such missions based on the new position of Right to Protect (R2P) and the Right to Protect with Responsibility (RwP). However, there has not always been agreement among the African leadership that such missions are strictly for the protection of civilians or have other motives. This is well illustrated by the intervention of NATO in Libya that generated debate as to whether the real aim of the intervention was protection of civilian or it went beyond this principle.

In light of these developments, the world has witnessed new forms of interventions in conflict situations on the continent. The first is the growing interventions in African conflict situations by the West, usually under the 'mandate' of protecting civilians. This is the case in Libya, Mali and CAR. The matter even becomes more challenging when it's not possible to seek consent from parties owing to their non-existence or if they exist, the framework for their involvement. This is itself a challenge to the normative UN principles of peacekeeping. There has also been the use of the Special Forces with stronger mandates aimed at resolving conflicts.

This is exemplified by the United Nations Force Intervention Brigade (UNFIB) in the DRC, which is primarily made of troops from Tanzania, South Africa and Malawi. This model has been considered successful in bringing some normalcy in the Eastern DRC, Nduwimana (2014).

The second is the increasing role and initiative of the AU. The AU has been involved in peacekeeping missions in Burundi, DRC Congo, Somalia and Mali. Currently the AU Mission in Somalia considered relatively successful has given prominence to the ability of the AU to effectively intervene in Africa conflicts and affairs. However, the regional body is still undergoing several challenges especially as regards funding which then makes the operations to be reliant on external sources. Despite the challenges, the AU framework provides for the increased participation of other parties in resolving conflicts especially at the grassroots levels such as community-based organizations.

Terrorism has added a new dimension to peacekeeping on the continent. Kenya is an example. The first duty of any government is to protect its civilians especially from external aggression, Kenya pursued the Al Shabaab terrorist gangs by crossing the border into Somalia. This intervention sought to achieve two objectives; it was not only directed at protecting Kenya from external aggression, but also to bring peace to Somalia and the region in general. The world community acknowledged this and Kenya became part of the wider AU peacekeeping mission in Somalia.

The conflict in Somalia shows how the non-use of force as a principle of peacekeeping has been challenged in the African situation. It is also a demonstration of how nation states when threatened by a force that has no legal basis such as the Al Shabaab can get together to confront the threat. A view mainly explained through the concept of national interest. While this may seem justified it has created a new dimension of peacekeeping as it creates a new set of actors to the conflict as has been exemplified in the Somalia conflict. The role of Kenya may be that of securing its borders but this may not be in tandem with for example, the interests of Uganda and Ethiopia. Al Shabaab has continued to launch attacks on Kenyan soil such as the siege of West Gate Mall in Nairobi, bus attacks in Garissa and Thika, among others, killing over 100 civilians, BBC, (December 2, 2014).

The Future of Peacekeeping in Africa

A number of factors will dictate the future of peace and peace keeping in Africa: The conflicts that are currently on going may persist for some time. These include the situation in Somalia, DRC, CAR, Mali, South Sudan, Sudan and Burundi. This is not to understate the likelihood of new conflict situations arising.

Nations have to keep up their efforts in developing and running viable states that meet the needs of their people and minimize conflicts.

AU's role and that of other regional bodies such as IGAD will increase particularly in countries such as South Sudan and the DRC. The defeat of terrorism in Somalia will lead to a stable Somalia and the Eastern African Region. Western nations will continue to play a key role in peace keeping in Africa, given their economic interests and the support of UN through its peace keeping mandates as challenged as they maybe.

The nature of conflict in Africa will continue to pose challenges to the normative principles of peacekeeping, as they stand defined by the UN.

Civilian organizations are likely to play a greater role in peace keeping in Africa than in the past. This includes peace centres and institutes and community organizations. These factors can further be classified into three categories that have a bearing on how peacekeeping will be conducted in the future. These include:

Global Economy versus Peacekeeping Operations: The future of peacekeeping in Africa depends on the state of the world economy. A continued economic crisis will constrain peacekeeping actors in Africa, more so the African ones. The difficulty of funding African missions is likely to reinforce Africa's dependency on the West in terms of resources. External funding comes with strings attached, which curtail 'African ownership.' The question thus is whether African ownership requires African funding for peace operations in the continent? The capabilities of African countries to contribute to the African Peace Fund will have the overall effect of enhancing ownership as well as ensuring that there is accountability and transparency in peace operations. This stems from the fact that AU member states will have a greater propensity to ensuring planning and implementation since they have a stake.

Regional Blocs versus Peacekeeping Operations: The role of regional blocs such as East African Community (EAC), Economic Commission for West African States (ECOWAS) and the South African Development Community (SADC) is likely to increase. However, their effectiveness in peace keeping will depend on cohesiveness, Collaboration, and political will of the countries involved. These blocs have a greater role beyond conflict resolution as they serve as economic development vehicles and thereby have the capacity to address many of the underlying issues that drive much of the conflict in Africa. Indeed, a bloc like the EAC has taken a greater role in establishing a framework of cooperation for security for its member states while at the same time aligning it to the operations of the community.

Constellation of Actors and their interests versus Peacekeeping: The increased constellation of peace actors in Africa may be an advantage or a challenge to peace operations and to the security of the continent. It could either result into increased self-centred interests and competition or increased teamwork and success in terms of bringing peace. This also relates to the new dimensions/interactions between the new actors, namely China versus old actors in the name of USA and the European countries.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that peacekeeping operations in Africa have been challenged and it may not be possible to continue working within the existing normative principles. As such, there should be continued interrogation of the issues arising and the proactive seeking of solutions and effective mechanisms of conflict resolution. The role that Africans should take in resolving their affairs is not a matter of choice but a priority as has been exemplified by the UN Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) and Kenya's intervention in Somalia.

Recommendations

There is need to develop a mechanism of funding peace operations in Africa while taking a greater role in the planning and execution of the same.

Frontline states that bear the greatest conflict in neighbouring countries should have significant input in AU and UN regional peace keeping missions

Use of regional economic communities close to the conflict may bring more commitment and appropriate intervention strategies due to proximity and affiliation to cultural environment.

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About Author;



Mr. Mbugua is a researcher at International Peace Support Training Centre (IPSTC) where he has published a number of Occasional Papers and Issue Briefs. Mr. Mbugua has extensive experience in security research, training and facilitating in peace and security.

Mr. Mbugua has done consultancy work for a number of organizations including UNDP, UN Women, National Council for Gender and Development, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, National Steering Committee on Peace building and Conflict Management, TJRC, GIZ, PACT-Kenya, Coalition for Peace in Africa (COPA), Nairobi Peace Initiative (NPI-Africa), and

Practical Action, among others. Mr. Mbugua holds a Master's degree in peace and justice from the University of San Diego in California and he is also a recipient of the prestigious Fulbright and Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarships from the United States.