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Peacekeeping successes and failures in Africa

Report

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When the colonial order ended in Africa, a myriad of problems confronted the new African nations. According to a recent study 16 wars took place between 1990 and 1997 in Africa. Of these, 14 were intrastate conflicts (Algeria, Angola, Chad, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, Western Sahara, and the Republic of Congo). Only 2 were interstate (Chad/Libya and Rwanda/Uganda).

In the 1990s US President George Bush Snr. announced the so-called "New World Order." As a result, he charted a new world security framework that called for United States leadership in international affairs while proposing an expanded use of the offices of the United Nations (UN) to endorse peacekeeping and peace building around the world. During the same period, the UN deployed 32 peacekeeping missions in the world, 13 were in Africa.

However, peacekeeping and peace building undertaken by the UN and the Security Council historically, has had mixed results. The deployment of UN peacekeeping troops has tended to be both tortuous and highly problematic because decisions to deploy peacekeeping forces cannot be made without the unanimity of the Security Council's five permanent members (the United States, Great Britain, France Russia and China). This has made rapid deployment of UN forces very often impossible.

In addition, the UN peacekeeping missions in Africa did not last long as a result of the Somalia fiasco in the 1990s. Led by the United States, the UN deployed peacekeeping and peace building troops in Somalia in December 1992, calling it Operation Restore Hope. In 1993, the United States withdrew its forces after 18 of its soldiers were killed during military operations there. Following the withdrawal of the United States, the larger UN operation failed and Somalia remains a nonexistent or failed state and became a threat not only for its own citizens but also for neighboring states.

Prominent peace operations do take place in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, and all encounter challenges that impede their performance. One may say in Africa these issues are compounded by serious logistical challenges combined with weak commitments from troop contributors that slowed the pace of peacekeeping growth. The number of UN forces in Africa actually declined in the period between October 2006 and October 2007. While these could be some of the reasons why peacekeeping operation in Africa didn't achieve their goals, other factors may also play a role in peacekeeping in Africa. Though conflict was, in some cases, prevented through intervention, often the solution imposed was a military solution without addressing the underlying issues of Africa's conflicts. International players such as the UN, the European Union, and the African Union are paying too much attention to peacekeeping and peace building, while none seems to pay much attention in the origins of the conflict in different parts of Africa such as

disputes over either grazing land or seasonal water for pastoral communities. Recovering from violent conflict is also neglected by the international community.

Rehabilitation and reconstruction of infrastructure is urgently needed after violent conflict. In recent decades the growth of urban populations has been tremendous in African countries. Water supply, power supply, transport systems, offices and houses are quickly made inoperable or destroyed, but are slow and costly to rebuild. In addition, disruption of roads, bridges, ports and airfields impede communication and distribution, and hinders integration and social unity. Beyond this, conflict destroys the networks for political and social cohesion. In order to re-establish and maintain peace these also need to be rebuilt.

Finally, since post-conflict peacebuilding is a new beginning, punishment and pardon must be used carefully, so as not to rekindle flames of hostility. Likewise, reintegration programmes need to promote education, employment and social equity, or they will not have the desired impact. Much of the failure to engage seriously the security problems of Africa or to come up with solutions stems from the failure to deal effectively with human security.

A recent example, from Liberia, was the launching of an effort together with 353 schools, colleges and other institutions to provide formal education to 20 000 disarmed former combatants as part of the country's Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) programme. It is designed to reshape their lives, help them get jobs, and give them a chance to be part of a better future for Liberia is a step forward.

Moreover, over the past three years, the ambitious dream of a comprehensive security architecture has been taking shape at a remarkable pace and the AU has become deeply involved in the continent's manifold security problems by building on the experiences and relying on the resources of the regional organizations.

In Burundi, for example, the African Union Mission (AMIB) stabilized the fragile situation and prepared the ground for a subsequent UN peacekeeping operation. In Darfur, the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) has, despite severe financial and logistical difficulties, done remarkably well in alleviating widespread suffering and containing a conflict in which no one else seems prepared to intervene. While all of these examples testify to the AU's dedicated efforts to develop a continental capacity for peace operations, the most telling indicator of the AU's commitment is its rapid progress in establishing the African Standby Force (ASF).

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[Home](#)

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[Disasters](#)

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