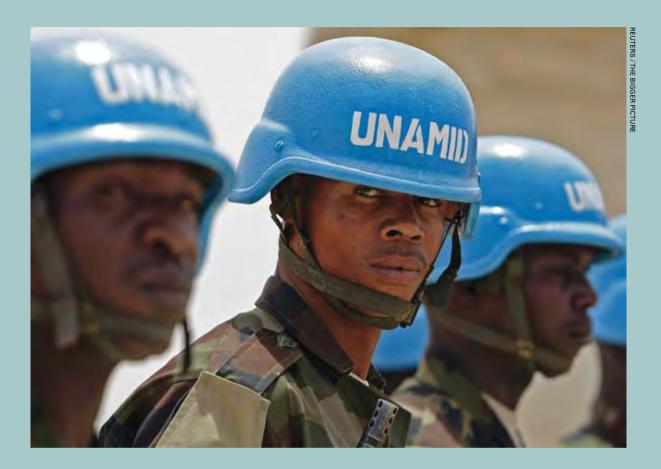# PEACEKEEPING CHALLENGES IN AFRICA: THE DARFUR CONFLICT

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Introduction

Of the international duties that Africa is noted for in the post-Cold War world, participation in peacekeeping is included. Africa is one of the major troop contributors in the numerous efforts to restore peace and order to various conflict areas, particularly those on the African continent. The bulk of African conflicts were either inherited, in the context of the post-colonial crisis[1] that bedevilled the continent, or came during the process of adjustment, consequent to the recession of Cold War politics. The conflict-inducing potential of the simultaneous pursuit of economic reforms, in the form of structural adjustment programmes and democratisation, has also been noted.[2] In addition, elections have proven to be a contentious issue, as the continent's entrenched leadership confront the reality of the periodic renewal of their mandate with the electorate.

The proliferation of peacekeeping missions is indicative of the international mandate of the United Nations (UN), in its attempt to provide the enabling environment necessary for the reconstruction of societies. However, while there is a willingness to provide troops by Africa and other Third World states in what appears to be the emerging international division of labour in peacekeeping, the provision of finance and

Abve: The peacekeeping force in Darfur was reconstituted in January 2008 into an African Union-United Nations hybrid operation (UNAMID).

logistics to accomplish the task is the role assumed by the developed world, and this is suffering from the donor fatigue apparent in post-Cold War relations. Indeed, while there is a conscious attempt by each continental organisation to learn to manage its own affairs without interference from another power external to the continent, Africa is lagging behind in this regard, in spite of the reformed African Union (AU).

This article examines the Darfur conundrum as a demonstration of the incapacity of the continent to manage its affairs. Darfur is the confluence of all that is wrong in Africa. Conflicts persist because the political will, troops and logistics necessary for their resolution are lacking.

Africa Within the Contemporary World Conflict Profile

What position does Africa occupy on the world's conflict map? How is the continent ranked in terms of its capacity to contain conflicts? Africa is ranked first and last, consecutively. Unfortunately, the continent is known to lead on all indexes used to describe crises. Although it is the most resource-endowed, Africa is also the most poverty-stricken continent.

Conflicts in Sudan, Somalia, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Uganda often make headlines. Reports on conflicts in Somalia and Sudan have remained in the media for years, and their resolution is presenting the AU – and, to a lesser extent, the international community – with a profound problem. In the case of Somalia, most African states are unwilling to send troops to support the peacekeeping efforts underway, because of the country's volatility. In Sudan, the transformation of the AU force to the AU/UN hybrid force (UNAMID), and the expectation to have 26 000 troops on the ground, have not materialised.[3] Presently, troops on the ground number less than 10 000, and are overextended.

The reality of the crises in most African countries following the end of the Cold War can be appreciated in the context of failed and failing states[4], and the interconnectedness of conflicts. The most endemic conflict areas on the continent are part of the states classified in the first category – such as Somalia, the DRC, Chad, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ethiopia. The end of the Cold War marked the end of stability for most of these countries. Somalia disintegrated in 1991 when General Siad Barre fled into exile, leaving a country in ruin. The inability of the government to continue holding the fragile state together was also related to the abrupt end of all aid, after a history of receiving significant aid. The country's strategic position on the continent made it an attractive point for Cold War rivals. Clan and kinship ties became the basis of identity in Somalia, and hundreds of identity groups re-emerged. These clans formed factions and continuously proliferated, making it impossible to comprehend the nature of alliances. Consequently, the character of politics became fluid and unpredictable. The 1993 attempt by the United States (US) to provide relief ended in a fiasco, and this set the precedent for all future international interventions.[5] Somalia is no longer on the international community's immediate agenda, and there is a noted lack of interest in the country.

The many conflicts in African countries have one thing in common: they are connected and not exclusive. Neighbouring states are not disinterested observers, as noted in Rwanda's support for Laurent Nkunda in eastern Congo; Ethiopia and Kenya's interest in Somalia; Chad's backing of the forces in Darfur; the attempt by the Khartoum government in Sudan to topple the regime in N'djamena, Chad; Uganda and Sudan's involvement over insurgents within their countries; and the interplay of forces in both Liberia and Sierra Leone. These examples of the spill-over and connectedness of conflicts in Africa indicate the difficulties associated with resolving them.

There are also those conflicts associated with democratisation and economic reforms. Almost all the countries in Africa that transitioned from either a single party or military dictatorship to a multiparty political system – largely under pressure from donor communities – have experienced conflict associated with elections. The latest occurrences of this have been in Kenya and Zimbabwe. The purported stability associated with Kenya was shattered following the polls conducted in December 2007. A government of national unity was put in place to pacify the parties involved, while ordinary Kenyans are still picking up the pieces of their shattered lives. The same scenario occurred in Côte d'Ivoire, with similarly devastating results. Attempts at resolving the crisis in Zimbabwe is underway, with the international community divided, following a failed bid to censor Zimbabwe's leadership at the UN Security Council. Election-related conflict is a residual effect of the entrenched leadership problem associated with governance in Africa. Elections – especially the quest for votes and the appeal to primordial divisive sentiments by politicians – have the potential to ignite conflict in Africa, as demonstrated in Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. It is a phenomenon that continues to threaten the fragile stability of most African states.

Peacekeepers verify vehicles at a checkpoint in Mogadishu, Somalia (June 2008).

Challenges in Darfur

Since the creation of the UN in 1945, peacekeeping has become a dominant feature of conflict resolution. UN peacekeeping history shows a total of 59 missions[6] from the first mission in 1948 to 2004. Currently, in Africa alone, there are missions in Darfur, Eritrea and Ethiopia, Somalia, Chad and the DRC. There have also been attempts to regionalise peacekeeping efforts, as exemplified by the Economic Community of West Africa Military Observer Group (ECOMOG) initiative.

The emergence of regional peacekeeping was predicated on the US application of the doctrine of burden-sharing and collaboration. Initially, this took place through the African Crisis Response Force (ACRF) – an initiative that followed the US experience in Somalia, and the lack of international action during the genocide in Rwanda and events in Burundi. The ACRF sought to build an African force that would intervene in African conflicts, thus reducing the demand for outside interventions by the members of the UN Security Council.[7] This approach has also been adopted by a number of other donor countries – notably France and Britain – in recent years. Associated with this is the colonial alignment of effort to resolve conflicts in their former colonies. Thus, Britain can be found in Sierra Leone, France in Chad, there is US support for ECOMOG

in Liberia, and the Belgians are visible in the DRC. Over time, the obvious intent of the ACRF gave way to a more nuanced approach, now termed the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI), within which the US trains selected African military elements for participation in peacekeeping operations.

In spite of these efforts, peacekeeping in Africa has been challenged, due to the continent's lack of economic and political resources to drive the process to its logical conclusion. The case of Darfur, and the politics that have dogged the peacekeeping operation since inception, is indicative of the crisis within. Darfur is entirely reliant on the goodwill of the international community for survival. Since the reconstitution of the peacekeeping force into an AU/UN hybrid force in January 2008 – supposedly for maximum efficiency – it has been unable to raise the required manpower necessary for deployment in the troubled region. There was a tacit understanding by those involved that Africa and most Third World states would meet the manpower requirements, while the West would provide the necessary logistical support. On both counts, neither manpower nor logistics have been fully provided for the force.

The available manpower is just over 9 000 of the expected 26 000 soldiers and police officers, who will not fully deploy until the end of the year.

Election related violence, as experienced in Kenya in early 2008, is a residual effect of the leadership and governance challenges in Africa.

The troops already in place – including the old AU force and two new battalions – lack essential equipment, such as sufficient armoured personnel carriers and helicopters, to carry out even the most rudimentary of peacekeeping tasks. So poorly provisioned were they that some personnel even had to buy their own paint to turn their green AU helmets into the UN blue.[8] A combination of bureaucratic delays, stonewalling by Sudan's government and reluctance from troop- and material-contributing countries to redeem their pledges and send peacekeeping forces into the area rendered the force vulnerable to attacks.[9]

The recent indictment and call to issue a warrant for the arrest of General Omar el-Bashir has added another drawback to the resolution of the Darfur crisis. The development has polarised the international community – in particular, the League of Arab States and the AU. These seeming differences in position play into the intransigence of the regime in Khartoum over the resolution of the Darfur crisis.

The Darfur initiative is representative of the continent in the post-Cold War and post-11 September 2001 world. In the first place, the AU is merely respon-

ding to initiatives emanating from outside its borders and, as such, has little or no say in the way they are managed. Peacekeeping initiatives to date have been at the mandate of the UN or erstwhile colonial powers, as the AU's limitations are manifested in restricted human and material resources and, above all, in the debilitating lack of political will. The manner in which the defunct Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was transformed into the AU did not overcome the weaknesses inherent in the old organisation, and has not provided the kind of leadership envisaged. Somalia, Chad and Sudan are constant reminders of the organisation's challenges in managing its own affairs.

The continent has not been able to fulfil its role as troop provider for peacekeeping endeavours in Africa. There is a seeming willingness to provide troops outside the continent, while pledges made for those on the continent remained unfulfilled. Unlike in Iraq and Afghanistan, the commitment of the developed world does not include sending personnel. Even regional peacekeeping efforts, such as ECOMOG, have had to rely on international support to fulfil their responsibilities. ECOMOG was not only *ad hoc*, but also

Peacekeepers from the Economic Community of West Africa Military Observer Group (ECOMOG) initiative, which represents attempts to regionalise peacekeeping efforts in Africa.

relied on Nigeria for funds and troops. This caused much suspicion among neighbouring countries about Nigeria's motives and intentions within the subregion.

Conclusion

The Darfur conflict points to the reality of international politics, where each continent looks after its own. It is similar to the reality of deployment of investment, where geography and location remain the key determinants of foreign direct investment. Thus, business enterprises in North America are more likely to rate Mexico and Latin America as markets of critical importance in their investment planning; Europeans expect the United Kingdom, France and the emerging economies of eastern Europe to feature more prominently in their calculations; and Asian firms expect China, India and the rest of Asia to be of greater importance for their investment.[10] A similar rationale applies when it comes to conflict resolution. Africa is conspicuously absent in this calculation, and this explains the problem confronting all peacekeeping efforts on the continent. Somalia is an extremely dangerous proposition for the West and, above all, unlike Iraq and Afghanistan, there

is no strategic importance to warrant direct intervention. The responsibility, therefore, remains a continental one.

The submission by the Darfur Consortium – that the Darfur peacekeeping force is too small in number, inadequately funded, lacks basic equipment and that most Darfurians have lost faith in the peacekeepers[11] – summed up the travails of peacekeeping and conflict resolution on the continent. Africa will continue to rely on the occasional goodwill of the developed world and a UN system that is, like Africa, dependent on the West. Neither South Africa nor Nigeria – the supposed resource-endowed states on the continent – are ready to assume a more significant role. Both states have their own internal problems: South Africa is smarting from the recent xenophobic attacks on Africans, which revealed the gap in unfulfilled promises to its citizens since the first democratic election in 1994. Nigeria is not only confronted with the common problem of a lack of economic opportunities but also poor governance, corruption and collapsed infrastructures. South Africa's role (or lack of it) in Zimbabwe did not please the West[12], whose agenda for regime change differs from what the continental and regional organisations

General Martin Luther Agwai is the overall commander of the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID).

are advocating. These differences in perspectives, opinions and strategies for intervening will continue to be to Africa's disadvantage as long as it continues to rely overwhelmingly on outside intervention for the management of its affairs.

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Endnotes

1   Laakso, Liisa and Olukoshi, Adebayo O. (1996) 'The Crisis of the Post-Colonial Nation-State Project in Africa' in Olukoshi, Adebayo O. and Laakso, Liisa (eds.) *Challenges to the Nation-State in Africa,* Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.

2   Mkandawire, Thandika and Olukoshi, Adebayo (eds.) (1995) *Between Liberalization and Oppression: The Politics of Structural Adjustment in Africa,* Dakar: CODESRIA.

3   Polgreen, Lydia (2008) 'Peacekeeping in Darfur Hits More Obstacles' in *The New York Times,* 24 March, Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/24/world/africa/24darfur.html> Accessed on 20 July 2008.

4   For failed states, see Zartman, I. William (1995) *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority,* Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner.

5   Operation Restore Hope was meant to provide relief for Somalis, but turned out to be a confrontation between US forces and militia men loyal to different warlords, especially General Fara Aideed. In the ensuing confrontation, some US servicemen were killed and dragged through the streets.

6   (2008) 'Peacekeeping', Available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peacekeeping> Accessed on 20 July 2008.

7   Cilliers, Jakkie 'Regional African Peacekeeping Capacity: Mythical Construct or Essential Tool?', Institute for Security Studies, Available at: <http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/ASR/8No4/Cilliers.html> Accessed on 20 July 2008.

8   Polgreen, Lydia (2008), op.cit.

9   Darfur Attack Kills Peacekeepers', Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7020596.stm> Accessed on 20 July 2008.

10 Columbia Program on International Investment (2007) *World Investment Prospects to 2011: Foreign Direct Investment and the Challenge of Political Risk*, London and New York: Economic Intelligence Unit, p.86.

11 'Darfur Force Failing Civilians', Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7528050.stm> Accessed on 11 August 2008.

12 It was also the case with Darfur and Zimbabwe, where extra-continental rivalry has impeded progress towards resolution. China and Russia, on the one hand, and the US and the rest of the Western world, on the other, have disagreed fundamentally over these conflict areas. Perhaps it provides an explanation for why the West developed cold feet in provisioning the peacekeeping force in Darfur. At the same time, it fails to explain why troop contributors from the continent have not fulfilled their pledges.