



Briefing Paper 330

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## SOUTH AFRICA'S PEACEKEEPING ACTIVITIES IN AFRICA (Part 1)

### 1. Introduction

On March 23, 2013, thirteen<sup>1</sup> South African peacekeepers were killed and 27 others wounded during clashes with rebel forces in the Central African Republic (CAR). The troops were members of an African Union contingent that was supporting the CAR's new government. Questions immediately arose within South Africa about the reasons for the country's military presence in CAR, and why South Africa was sending troops to other countries while it faces numerous current domestic challenges. President Jacob Zuma withdrew South African forces from CAR in April. However, South African troops continue to provide support to international peacekeeping efforts, in particular sending more troops to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) last month.

Participation in peace efforts has been a priority to the South African government since 1994. This involvement has been synonymous with South Africa's goal of being a leader on the African continent. However, the questions raised by the CAR episode remain. The purpose of this briefing paper, the first of two on this topic, is to provide background on the peacekeeping efforts undertaken by South Africa and the international community as a whole. South Africa has a strong history of participation in both AU and UN missions, and as a result, important lessons can be drawn from its experiences. The second paper will

consider case studies and specific examples of South Africa's peacekeeping efforts.

### 2. What is Peacekeeping?

Since the end of the Cold War, efforts at peacekeeping by the international community have increased. The 2000 Brahimi Report from the

United Nations divides peace operations into three categories: peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. *Peacemaking* attempts to bring conflicts to a halt through diplomacy and mediation. On the other side, *peacebuilding* is a more recent term that defines activities undertaken "to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war" once violence has ended.<sup>2</sup> *Peacekeeping* occurs after a peace treaty has been signed and aims to ensure that the warring parties abide by the terms of the agreement. It involves a military presence from a neutral force. UN Peacekeeping is guided by three basic principles: the consent of the parties, impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate.<sup>3</sup>

While these distinctions are important, the UN, African Union, and South Africa understand that peacekeeping requires a multidimensional approach. It is not sufficient simply to focus on

diplomacy, or military efforts, to enforce peace. South African forces are involved in delivering humanitarian aid, building institutions such as the police, and negotiating with civilian leaders, activities that do not fall under the traditional responsibilities of peacekeepers. In order for a mission to be successful, peacekeeping cannot be exclusive of the other aspects of building peace.

While South Africa has been involved in all three categories, this paper will focus primarily on efforts that fall under the peacekeeping dimension. Peacekeeping requires a framework or some sort of arrangement that the parties to a conflict have agreed to, and which the international community can enforce. Importantly, it requires one where the country's elites have 'bought-in' to the agreement. UN peacekeepers are usually deployed under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, and while each mission has a different mandate, most include preventing outbreaks of conflict, disarming troops, and enforcing peace treaty obligations. In recent years, mission mandates have been strengthened after repeated criticisms that UN troops did not have a strong enough mandate to protect civilians.

The UN is not the only player in the field. Increasingly, continental and regional bodies have been undertaking peacekeeping operations, in particular the African Union. Since most peacekeeping operations are located in Africa, South Africa and other African nations have pushed for these operations to be led by an African body. Thus, the AU itself, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have all undertaken peacekeeping operations recently.

With the realization that peace efforts must be multidimensional, peacebuilding has become an industry.<sup>4</sup> A range of international, regional, national, and local actors are involved. Since the increase of peacekeeping efforts by multilateral bodies in the post-Cold War period, other international organizations such as the World Bank, and non-governmental organizations such as Catholic Relief Services, have set up peacebuilding divisions. While countries such as South Africa may send troops to a region, other organizations are simultaneously undertaking peacebuilding efforts. These international actors bring an influx of foreign aid and experience, but can also exacerbate conflict through competition for resources.

With so many different actors involved in peacekeeping efforts, it becomes difficult to evaluate their effectiveness. Peacekeeping has had a positive impact in many countries where efforts by troops to enforce peace agreements have prevented the outbreak of more armed conflict. For example, the people of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Burundi are experiencing sustained periods of peace after peacekeeping operations were conducted in their countries. However, the evidence that peacekeeping is only positive is not overwhelming. Multiple case studies point to the negative effects of peacekeeping operations, including an increase in criminal activities and corruption, and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Peacekeepers face a lack of resources, difficult terrain, unclear mandates, and hostile warring parties as some of the many challenges to their mission in the field.

### **3. South Africa's History of Peacekeeping**

Since the end of apartheid, South Africa's foreign policy has been characterized by a desire to lead the continent. 'Africa Rising,' Thabo Mbeki's initiative, placed a priority on bringing African solutions to African problems. Jacob Zuma's policies have continued Mbeki's emphasis, though in a less visible way. South Africa's government understands that its security is directly linked to the stability and prosperity of the African continent.<sup>5</sup> South Africa cannot be an island of peace and stability in an otherwise struggling region. Unrest and conflict outside its borders will affect the internal dynamics of South African politics. For example, the election violence in Zimbabwe in 2008 caused a massive influx of Zimbabwean refugees, which in turn led to an increase in xenophobic tensions.

Yet questions remain about the country's foreign policy priorities, and its capacity to fulfill its international obligations on the peacekeeping front. In the post-apartheid era, South Africa's foreign policy ambitions remain constrained by three important factors: the unresolved issue of South Africa's identity on the international stage; the African continent's divided reaction to South African leadership; and domestic limitations linked to material capabilities and internal politics.<sup>6</sup> South Africa's foreign policy emphasizes its unique role

as a post-apartheid democracy with important contributions to offer, particularly for conflict situations. At the same time, its position as a regional hegemon makes other countries suspicious of its involvement.

That South Africa has grown in terms of its influence on the international stage is clear. It is Africa's largest economy, and recently joined Brazil, Russia, India and China in the BRICS group of nations. Also, it sees itself as promoting African interests on the world stage, such as when it was on the UN Security Council in 2007-2008 and 2011-2012. At the same time, though, other African countries view South Africa as a regional hegemon that simply represents its own interests, not the interests of the continent as a whole. South Africa's assertiveness in international fora, and its involvement in controversies at the African Union for example,<sup>7</sup> are regarded with suspicion by other African countries. Finally, the domestic challenges of poverty, crime, and unemployment make any international commitments suspect since the huge sums involved in peacekeeping could arguably be better spent at home.

South Africa's strategy is outlined in a 1999 White Paper on peacekeeping published by the Department of Foreign Affairs. The paper defines the criteria for involvement in a peacekeeping mission: how closely the mission relates to national interests; the demand for South Africa's expertise and perspective; a clear international mandate; and sufficient means available for the execution of the mandate. Since then, successive documents such as the 2011 foreign policy White Paper have outlined South Africa's position on peacekeeping. The government's 2013 Defense Review also addresses the issue of peace, clearly stating that South Africa's position as a leader of the continent requires it not only to contribute to democracy and economic growth, but also to play a leading role in peace operations. The "government's commitment to regional and continental peace and security implies a long term involvement in collective defence and security, including participation in security structures, peace missions, standby arrangements and other defence cooperation."<sup>8</sup>

As a result of this commitment to building peace on the African continent, South Africa has sent peacekeeping troops into many of Africa's most protracted conflicts, including in Burundi, the

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Ethiopia/Eritrea border, Liberia, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Burundi is considered one of South Africa's most successful operations. Beginning in 1999 with Nelson Mandela's efforts to mediate the conflict, troops were deployed with both the AU and the UN in 2001 until 2006. While the national strategy and motivations for intervention in Burundi were clear, in countries such as the Central African Republic there was a lack of clarity with the public in terms of the mission and strategy behind the South African engagement.<sup>9</sup>

Currently, South Africa is ranked sixth out of African countries (fourteenth in the world) in terms of troop contributions to UN missions, with over 2,000 troops deployed.<sup>10</sup> While it does not contribute as many troops as other African countries such as Burundi or Ethiopia, its impact on peacekeeping efforts is significant. In particular, the SANDF is contributing (along with Tanzania and Malawi) to a UN Force Intervention Brigade in the DRC to carry out offensive operations against rebels, a first for any UN mission.<sup>11</sup>

#### **4. The Catholic Church and Peacebuilding**

Drawing on both scripture and tradition, the Church believes that building and promoting peace is a critical component of a believer's responsibility as a Christian. In his message to celebrate the World Day of Peace in 2013, Pope Benedict XVI wrote "the desire for peace corresponds to a fundamental moral principle, namely, the duty and right to an integral social and communitarian development, which is part of God's plan for humankind." The Church distinguishes peace not simply as the absence of war, but as having a right relationship with God, oneself, and others.<sup>12</sup> As a result, peacekeeping cannot be simply ending conflict, but must come with a stronger and deeper reconciliation based on economic justice, forgiveness, and the healing of relationships.

The Catholic Church has supported the United Nations from its inception.<sup>13</sup> The Holy See Mission to the UN has argued that the body must "explore thoroughly the problem of the use of force to disarm the aggressor" in order to prevent violence from occurring.<sup>14</sup> In accordance with *jus in bello* principles, the Church has been unequivocal in denouncing violence against civilians and in its

support for arms treaties to reduce weapons in conflict. As a result, the Church has urged peacekeepers to protect civilians and establish peace, but it recognizes that, even at their best, peacekeepers cannot be seen as the only answer to conflict. Both the church's membership and its leadership must therefore act in ways that promote peace. In particular, it is important for bishops and others in Church leadership to express their solidarity with the Church in conflict zones, and to build relationships for peace.<sup>15</sup>

## 5. Lessons Learned

In its future as a peacekeeping nation – one that does not just end conflict, but promotes peace – South Africa faces significant challenges. Yet even so, South Africa remains one of the more attractive options for leading peacekeeping operations. Its experiences as a post-apartheid democracy lend it a moral legitimacy and the lessons learned from previous peacekeeping deployments have given South Africa considerable expertise. At the same time, South Africa's leaders make decisions based on its national interests, and this may limit the extent to which the country can involve itself in peacekeeping operations.

The first goal of every peacekeeping effort must be to avoid making a conflict situation worse. In this regard, important lessons can be drawn from South Africa's peace operations in Burundi, CAR, Sudan and elsewhere. First, there must be consistent policy leadership at all levels of the operation. Accounts from individuals involved in the Burundi operation show that it was rare that reference was made to policy, especially the White Paper.<sup>16</sup> Strong leadership is needed to make sure the vision is clear and that co-ordination between the various departments involved in peacekeeping is effective. South Africa has good policy directives in its White Paper and foreign policy, but their implementation must be made operational.

Second, there must be a sustained media campaign prior to deployment to garner political support for the operation and to explain the intentions and reasons behind South African involvement. In the CAR, many expressed dismay that South African troops were even stationed in the country, and many questioned the political motivations for their deployment. Peace operations should be

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transparent so that the South African people can hold their leaders accountable for their efforts.

Finally, South Africa faces a lack of readiness in its armed forces. The South African National Defence Force (SANDF) struggles to make ends meet, and its personnel often do not have the proper training for peacekeeping operations.<sup>17</sup> South Africa's military must tackle the issues of high HIV/AIDS infection rates, an aging soldier population, a high general to troop ratio, the absence of a reserve force, and a serious skills shortage, particularly when it comes to addressing the difficult questions of peacekeeping (such as protecting civilians, building infrastructure, and difficult terrain). As a result, South African troops have been accused of abusing the civilians they are supposed to protect. In the DRC, 93 cases of misconduct (with 23 counts of sexual abuse) have been brought against South African troops. These accusations point to a discipline problem within the SANDF.<sup>18</sup> If South Africa's forces are to build peace, the country must invest in training its troops to focus on human security and protecting civilians, and not only on traditional warfare tactics.

If South Africa can apply these lessons to future operations, its effectiveness in peacekeeping can increase significantly. However, the most important challenge requires strategic decision-making by the South African government. South's Africa's peacekeeping efforts have been severely hampered by a disconnect between its commitments on the African continent and the allocation of resources to its forces from the government. If peacekeeping is going to be done well, the operation must be properly equipped to do its job. South Africa needs to answer the question of whether it is willing to commit the resources necessary to support its peacekeeping ambitions. If it is not, those ambitions must be scaled back, or abandoned.

## 6. Conclusion

In the twenty years since the end of apartheid, South Africa has increased its influence on the African continent through its peacekeeping endeavors. While this influence has led to positive developments, the South African government must address questions related to its vision for the continent, strategic interests, and future

capabilities. Drawing from this paper's background on South Africa's peacekeeping, the next paper will analyze three case studies from South Africa's experience (Burundi, CAR, and the DRC) and consider whether they worsened the conflict or contributed to peace. These three examples illustrate important challenges faced during a peacekeeping operation and the questions raised

through South Africa's policies. From these experiences, the paper will assess South Africa's peacekeeping role as the country seeks to make policy decisions that promote peace on the continent while using its resources strategically.

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<sup>1</sup> Some reports say 14 peacekeepers were killed (13 plus 1 missing in action)

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (known as the Brahimi Report).

[http://www.un.org/peace/reports/peace\\_operations/](http://www.un.org/peace/reports/peace_operations/).

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Peacekeeping, accessed September 3, 2013.

<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/operations/peacekeeping.shtml>.

<sup>4</sup> Curtis, Devon and Gwinyayi A. Dzinesa, ed. *Peacebuilding, Power, and Politics in Africa*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> The South African Defence Review 2013,

<http://www.sadefencereview2012.org/publications/3rd%20DRAFT/Defence%20Review~Summary~20130416.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Alden, Christopher and Maxi Schoeman. "South Africa in the Company of Giants: The Search for Leadership in a Transforming Global Order." *International Affairs*, 89 (2013): 11-129..

<sup>7</sup> Parker, Faranaaz. "SA Will Need to Build Bridges at the African Union," Mail & Guardian, 17 July 2012, accessed September 3, 2013, <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-07-16-sa-will-need-to-build-bridges-at-the-au>.

<sup>8</sup> Summary of the South African Defence Review, 2013. pp.13

<http://www.sadefencereview2012.org/publications/3rd%20DRAFT/Defence%20Review~Summary~20130416.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Tjiurimo Hengari, "Summit TV: South Africa's failed mission in Africa." April 8, 2013.

<http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/2013/04/05/summit-tv-south-africa-s-failed-mission-in-africa>.

<sup>10</sup> Contributors to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, Monthly Summary of Contributions as of 31 July 2013.

[http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/contributors/2013/jul13\\_1.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/contributors/2013/jul13_1.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Gallo, Carol Jean and Christoph Vogel, "UN's Elite Force Raises the Stakes in DRC," Aljazeera.com, 16 July 2013.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/07/201371595015796872.html>

<sup>12</sup> "We're all part of God's peace-keeping force," The Catholic News, February 3, 2008.

[http://www.catholicnews.sg/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=603&Itemid=68](http://www.catholicnews.sg/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=603&Itemid=68).

<sup>13</sup> Address of Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary of State of the Holy See, at the High-level Plenary Meeting of the 60th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. New York, 16 September 2005.

<http://www.holyseemission.org/about/john-paul-speech-at-the-un.aspx>.

<sup>14</sup> Address of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Fiftieth General Assembly of the United Nations Organization. New York, October 5, 1995. <http://www.holyseemission.org/statements/statement.aspx?id=201>.

<sup>15</sup> Bishop John H. Ricard, SSJ, Presentation to Conference on Catholic Peacebuilding, "How Can the Church Outside the Great Lakes Region Strengthen the Capacity of the Church Here to Engage in Peacebuilding?"

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/global-issues/africa/burundi/presentation-to-conference-on-catholic-peacebuilding.cfm>

<sup>16</sup> The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes. South Africa's Peacekeeping Role in Burundi: Challenges and Opportunities for Future Peace Missions. Occasional Paper Series: Volume 2, Number 2 (2007): 47.

[http://www.accord.org.za/images/downloads/op/op\\_2007\\_2.pdf](http://www.accord.org.za/images/downloads/op/op_2007_2.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> IRIN News, "Analysis: South Africa - Paper Tiger of African Peacekeeping Operations," 6 January 2012.

<http://www.irinnews.org/report/94597/analysis-south-africa-paper-tiger-of-african-peacekeeping-operations>

<sup>18</sup> Patel, Khadija, "Peacekeepers Behaving Badly: Why South African Ill-Discipline in DRC is a UN Problem," The Daily Maverick, 14 June 2013. <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-06-14-peacekeepers-behaving-badly-why-south-african-ill-discipline-in-drc-is-a-un-problem/#.UhXcc2TEpvY>.