



Briefing Paper 332

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South Africa's Peacekeeping Activities in Africa (Part 2)

1. Introduction

Since the end of apartheid, promoting peace on the African continent has been a priority in South Africa's foreign policy. While in 1994 South Africa was the success story of the continent, other parts of the region faced catastrophic violence. For example, the Rwandan genocide was followed by years of war within the Great Lakes region; and Sudan, Somalia, and some West-African states were engulfed in violence through the 1990s and 2000s. As the largest economy on the continent and an example of a peaceful transition to democracy, the international community looked to South Africa to take a leading role in peacekeeping efforts in the region. However, South Africa's pressing domestic agenda in the post-apartheid era has made the expensive endeavour of peacekeeping difficult. South Africa has faced criticism on both sides, with some people claiming it acted as a 'big brother' by intervening too much, and others arguing that it should do more.

This paper is the second in a two part series. The first paper gave background on peacekeeping and discussed South Africa's role and the lessons learned from its peacekeeping efforts. In summary, this paper will explore three case studies and ask how they have influenced current policy questions. Entire books have been written on each of these conflicts, and this briefing paper will simply provide a brief introduction while focusing on South Africa's role in those conflicts. The paper will conclude with analysis on South Africa's future in peacekeeping.

2. Burundi

One of South Africa's first interventions in peacekeeping was the conflict in Burundi. In many ways, this intervention provided valuable lessons for further conflicts and deeply influenced South Africa's future role. The roots of the conflict in Burundi go back to colonialism, when the Belgians exacerbated tensions between two ethnic groups: the Hutu and the Tutsi. While its northern neighbour Rwanda has received more international spotlight for the genocide in 1994, Burundi underwent a similar horror. Beginning in 1972 with the massacre of approximately 120,000 Hutus by the government, Burundi experienced sporadic violence until Melchior Ndadaye became its first democratically elected leader in 1993. A Hutu intellectual, Ndadaye began a programme of reform which alienated Tutsi extremists, who assassinated him later the same year. This assassination is considered the beginning of Burundi's civil war, in which over 300,000 people were killed.¹

This history of violence set the backdrop for South Africa's first significant post-apartheid peacekeeping mission.² After years of peace attempts, former SA president Nelson Mandela led the Arusha peace process in 2000, inviting 19 different groups who were involved in Burundi's civil war to participate.³ When the Arusha Accord was signed in 2000, it laid out a framework for a transitional government that would culminate in democratic elections. The agreement allowed international peacekeepers to enter Burundi, and South African soldiers formed the first contingent of troops charged with protecting exiled political leaders as they returned to join the transition government.⁴ South Africa went on to be involved in five missions to Burundi from 2001-2007, under both the AU and the UN.⁵

The first deployment was not a traditional peacekeeping mission because, while the Arusha Accord had been agreed upon, there had not been a ceasefire signed. However, South Africa deemed it necessary to protect political leaders from assassination so that the peace process could begin. The haste with which the troops were deployed caused confusion on a policy level for many in South Africa's National Defence Force (SANDF),⁶ as did working with the AU and the UN. Expense was also an issue, with South Africa covering its costs until the UN arrived (the 2002 operation estimate was R130 million⁷).

Yet even with these challenges, the overall mission was a success. Through its initial deployment, South Africa paved the way for the AU and UN missions. South Africa contributed a majority of the peacekeeping troops on the ground throughout, with 1,500 troops contributed to the UN mission. SA's deployment was also the longest, and its troops provided valuable experience to the different missions, and left Burundi with at least a fragile peace. Since then, SA has continued to build its relationship with the country: President Zuma visited Burundi in 2011 to promote economic ties and was involved in negotiations in 2010 between opposition leaders and the government.⁸

Today in Burundi, while tension and uncertainty continues, there is an overall sense of optimism over the country's direction. Human rights groups such as Amnesty International praise Burundi for its embrace of democracy (particularly in comparison to its northern neighbor Rwanda).⁹ Peace is fragile, yet it is making progress, and overall South Africa's peacekeeping efforts were a positive contribution to the peace process.

3. Central African Republic

Relatively little research has been done on the Central African Republic (CAR), a country that has faced several coups in the years since independence in 1960. A country of over five million people, it is fourth-worst in the world for infant mortality rates, and average life expectancy is only 51 years.¹⁰ It has been plagued by military dictatorships and corruption and, while endowed with many natural resources, is one of the poorest countries in the world.

South Africa's intervention in CAR, unlike the other two interventions analyzed in this paper, was not under the auspices of the UN or the AU. President Zuma authorized the deployment of 400 soldiers between 2 January 2013 and 31 March 2018, as part of a military co-operation agreement with the CAR government to provide military training, to support disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes. While President Zuma initially put the cost for deployment at R65 million, he later clarified that the operation would cost over R1 billion (for the five years that the 400 soldiers would be stationed there).¹¹

The official reasoning for the CAR deployment was to build that country's defence capacity, and to prevent further instability from threatening the region. The effect of CAR as an essentially lawless state has been a major concern for operations throughout the region, including the combating of the Lord's Resistance Army from Uganda, and peace efforts in the DRC, which has strategic importance for South Africa. But despite these official reasons, questions were raised about South Africa's presence, particularly in competition with the French government's increasingly active role on the continent.¹² Clearly, economic interests were at stake for South Africa in CAR. Under President Bozizé's rule, South African mining companies received contracts, and any threat to his control of the government could have threatened those contracts.¹³

Disaster struck in March this year, when rebel forces overwhelmed the capital, causing President Bozizé to flee the country, and killing 13 South African troops and injuring 27 others. While the SA government said that the troops were defending the military base, other reports suggest they were defending the capital itself, alongside CAR soldiers.¹⁴ President Zuma subsequently ordered the troops to leave the country, and there are no plans for South Africa to return. It could be argued that South Africa's deployment in CAR was a failure because it was supporting a corrupt, unpopular government, and it failed to act impartially in the conflict. Another weakness was the lack of preparedness by the troops; reports suggest that the SANDF was overwhelmed and outnumbered in its fight with rebel soldiers, and that it lacked the proper capacity to defend its base.

Major questions were raised about South Africa's peacekeeping efforts as a result of the CAR

deployment. Democratic Alliance MP David Maynier stated that “the nature of the battle calls into question whether the President misled Parliament when he informed members of the joint standing committee on defence that the SANDF was being deployed in CAR to help with ‘capacity building.’ It now seems they were deployed to defend particular economic interests near the capital on behalf of a corrupt, authoritarian and unpopular government.”¹⁵ As the *Economist* noted in April, the deaths of 13 soldiers exposed the limitations of South Africa’s big-power ambitions.¹⁶ Not only did this episode raise questions about its capabilities as a military power on the continent, it also called into question South Africa’s entire foreign policy.

Today, the CAR is on a downward spiral. UN chief Ban Ki-moon has said that CAR has suffered a “total breakdown of law and order”.¹⁷ Rebel soldiers who took over the country are killing civilians and looting.¹⁸ Certainly, the political capital that would be needed for South Africa to get involved again has disappeared. The CAR intervention shows the danger when a peacekeeping mission goes awry, not only for the soldiers and civilians who lose their lives, but also for any future possibility of assistance.

4. The Democratic Republic of the Congo

South Africa has a long history of involvement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In one of the most protracted conflicts on the continent, the DRC has been at war for over a decade. A UN mission was established in the DRC in 1999, and through various iterations, the latest of which is known as MONUSCO, it has become the longest running mission in the UN’s history. Like Burundi, the DRC has a long history of conflict, from the colonial regime to the dictatorship of Joseph Mobutu to the war involving the DRC, Uganda, and Rwanda that killed up to four million people.¹⁹

The most recent crisis point occurred in November 2012, when the M23 rebel group captured Goma, in the far east of the country, causing 800,000 people to flee their homes. Human Rights Watch reports that since March 2013 the M23 have executed at least 44 people and raped at least 61 women and girls.²⁰ The critical question became why, when democratic elections had occurred and the largest UN peacekeeping mission in history was stationed in the area, were the rebels able to overrun a major

city so easily? The UN was blamed for its inaction, causing even more disillusionment over international efforts for peacekeeping in the region.²¹ At the time of the Goma attack, 850 South African soldiers were stationed in the area as part of the UN mission. As SADC and other actors pressured the UN to take a more active role, MONUSCO needed to make changes.

In response, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2098, authorizing the first ever Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) with a mandate to conduct offensive operations against the rebel forces, and not only to protect civilians.²² This was a significant departure from the traditional duties of a peacekeeping mission. South Africa, Tanzania, and Malawi are contributing troops, bringing the number of SA troops in the DRC to 1,345.²³ The Brigade is controversial, with many arguing that another 3,000 soldiers will add more violence.²⁴

The conflict in the DRC has significant regional implications. In particular, supporting the UN mission (and by extension the Congolese army) causes tension with Rwanda. The UN has accused Rwanda of supporting the M23, and Rwandan troops are being deployed along the border, raising tensions and concerns that it may intervene.²⁵ This escalation is dangerous, and South Africa’s involvement makes it a player in the continued conflict, while putting SA troops and Congolese civilians at risk.

So far, reports from the ground about the SANDF’s efforts have been positive, bolstering its damaged reputation after CAR.²⁶ As of publication of this paper, the FIB had taken control of a previous rebel stronghold, and was holding the area as diplomats from both sides returned to the negotiating table. This success is a step forward for the future of similar brigades in the future of peacekeeping. Yet SA’s efforts in the DRC have not been without controversy. There have been reports in the past of misconduct by its troops,²⁷ and questions remain over whether the brigade is appropriate for the mission – is it too small, and is it mobile enough?²⁸ Critically for the reputation of the UN mission, there has been tension because of its lack of impartiality which, in turn, threatens the ability of the UN, and South Africa, to be brokers in the conflict.

Even if the Force Intervention Brigade itself is successful, questions remain for peace in the DRC as a whole. There are multiple factors that exacerbate the conflict, and the efforts of South

Africa's troops to protect civilians cannot answer the questions caused by land issues, arms control, disarmament, and the division of resources. The DRC is a prime example of why peacekeeping, even when it is successful, must be accompanied by comprehensive efforts at peacebuilding. The rule of law, a strong civil society, and a just security system are necessary for peace to be accomplished. The final outcome of South Africa's efforts in the DRC has yet to be seen.

5. Conclusion

The previous paper argued that SA needs consistent policy leadership, a sustained media campaign to keep the public informed on its peacekeeping activities, and an investment in its armed forces to ensure their preparedness when going into the field. From the three case studies, it is clear that these issues affected the campaigns in Burundi, CAR, and the DRC. However, it is encouraging to see the SA government move to correct these issues in the current mission to the DRC. Today, the SANDF conducts regular press briefings to update the public on the activities of its troops in the DRC.²⁹ Yet there continues to be a dichotomy between South Africa's foreign policy ambitions and the reality of its capabilities.³⁰

South Africa has made many positive contributions to peacekeeping efforts on the continent. In particular, its continued investment in countries provides the military with valuable experience when it comes to operations on the ground. In both Burundi and the DRC, troops

have provided stability and security for political leaders to negotiate. Yet it has faced several setbacks. When its motives were questionable, as in CAR, the intervention has done more harm than good in the region. With a lack of capacity, the ability of its troops to carry out their role is harmed. Peacekeepers are by definition an outside force, and while such a force can provide leverage and international attention, and act as a mediator, it also disrupts local networks and local capacity.

The SA government is currently reviewing its White Paper on international peacekeeping. As it conducts this review, the lessons from peacekeeping missions will be vital in order to evaluate the country's future efforts. Peacekeeping is a priority for the country, but the gap between vision and capacity must be addressed. When Nelson Mandela took office in 1994, he pledged that human rights would be "the light that guides our foreign affairs".³¹ For South Africa to live up to that promise, its peacekeeping efforts must be not only be guided by protecting human lives, but must also have the capacity and experience to be effective.

Lucy Dunderdale Research Intern

Lucy Dunderdale is a Master's student in Peace Studies at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, Notre Dame University, Indiana, USA. She is currently completing a six-month internship at the CPLO.

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² South Africa began peacekeeping in the DRC around the same time, but it was not the same scope.

³ "Plunging in at the Deep End; South African Foreign Policy." (2001, Nov 03) *The Economist*, 361, 69-53. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/224051948?accountid=12874>.

⁴ Cauvin, Henri E. "Burundi: South Africa to send troops." *New York Times* 27 Oct. 2001: A6. *Business Insights: Essentials*. Web. 2 Sept. 2013.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Manual, T. (2002), National Budget Speech 2002, 20 February.

⁸ "South Africa's president to visit Burundi." *Xinhua News Agency* 5 Aug. 2011. *Business Insights: Essentials*. Web. 2 Sept. 2013.

⁹ Mwachiro, Kevin. "What Burundi Could Teach Rwanda About Reconciliation," BBC News, 13 August 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-19182107>.

¹⁰ Numbers taken from the CIA World Factbook

¹¹ "South Africa's Zuma reveals cost of deploying troops to Central African Republic." *BBC Monitoring International Reports* 12 Feb. 2013. *Business Insights: Essentials*. Web. 3 Sept. 2013.

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- ¹⁷ "Central African Republic Profile," BBC News, 20 August 2013. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13150044>.
- ¹⁸ UN News Service, "Central African Republic: UN Underscores Grave Humanitarian, Human Rights Situation," AllAfrica.com, 1 October 2013, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201310021378.html>.
- ¹⁹ This number is debated amongst experts, with the estimates ranging from 500,000 to 5 million people killed.
- ²⁰ Human Rights Watch, "DR Congo: M23 Rebels Kill, Rape Civilians," July 22, 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/07/22/dr-congo-m23-rebels-kill-rape-civilians>.
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