
UNIT 10 UNITED NATIONS, PEACEKEEPING AND AFRICA

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10.1 INTRODUCTION

The situation in Africa is paradoxical. In the sense that some of its problems are unique and others are common to most other countries and continents. Yet, the African problems have received **maximum** attention by the world. In return, Africa too has made valuable contribution to the resolution of common problems. The United Nations peacekeeping activity can serve as a very apt example of this inter-relationship. While nearly half of Africa's 53 countries actively helped the United Nations by contributing troops to its various peacekeeping operations, the largest number of these operations — 20 of some 56 so far — were dedicated to the cause of bringing peace in various parts of Africa.

10.2 CAUSES OF CONFLICT IN AFRICA

War, disease, debt, hunger and exploitation are different facets of conflict in Africa. The reasons can be traced to the colonial past, political mess in the post-Independence governance, social disunity, and interference from countries outside etc.

The bulk of Africa is relatively new to emerge on the world political stage. In 1945 just four countries could become members of the newly founded United Nations. After the decolonisation process picked up momentum, 25 countries became free in Africa: from Namibia to Eritrea, and from Algeria to Zambia. While some like Kenya, Congo, Ghana and Zambia gained freedom without clashing arms against their colonial masters, people of Algeria, Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe had to wage armed struggles. Again, some of the problems faced by these countries are a legacy of their colonial past. The arbitrarily drawn boundaries in much of Africa provide an apt example. When you look at Africa's political map, the boundary lines drawn by a scale in many cases including Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Namibia, Niger, Somalia, Sudan, etc will strike you. These arbitrary, but not well demarcated lines led to problems in several cases. For example, border clashes occurred between Tanzania and Uganda, Ethiopia and Somalia, and lately between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The borders also left many social and ethnic groups across national boundaries. Side by side, the new states were unable to cement the ethnic differences and assimilate minority groups with the

mainstream. The fall out of this was social unrest in many countries often seen in the refugee flows from one country to another. Currently, according to UN estimates, there are nearly 10 million refugees—higher than any other continent. In some cases, ethnic nationalism had prompted separatist movements, which were ruthlessly suppressed in the Katanga province of the Congo and Biafra of Nigeria. Sudan is facing similar problems presently.

Economic and social backwardness has also been an underlying cause for conflict in Africa. The lack of a noteworthy education along with high rate of child mortality rates is part of encouraging trouble. According to estimates, AIDS killed, during 1990s, ten times more people in Africa than did armed conflicts. Ninety per cent of the world's children who became destitute because of the AIDS epidemic are found in Africa! Deforestation and loss of soil quality led to famines and starvation deaths consistently over the past two decades in the Horn of Africa and other parts. It was reported that 23 countries in sub-Saharan Africa needed emergency food aid because of civil wars, drought, internal displacement and economic disruption. Despite the fact that Africa is endowed with several profitable mineral resources, lack of skilled manpower and indigenous infrastructure are responsible for economic stagnation. Little wonder that Africa is home of 48 least developed countries in the world. In much of sub-Saharan Africa, per capita of income is less than US \$2 a day. The governments are unable to raise resources because their exports do not fetch dependable returns and foreign aid is of little significance. While foreign investment is scarce (1 per cent of global foreign investments), African debts are shooting sharply, African debt, as per some latest estimates, had grown nearly ten times in the past three decades: from US \$350 million in 1970s to 400 billion in 2000. The United Nations Secretary-General, Mofi Annan (incidentally a national from an African country, Ghana) stated that the world had failed Africa "by not adequately addressing the causes of conflict; by not doing enough to ensure peace; and by our repeated inability to create the conditions for sustainable development."

Africa has also failed to develop a participatory and accountable political system. Military dictatorships overthrew democratic regimes, as happened in Nigeria, Uganda, Burundi, Sierra Leone, etc. and in a few others one party dictatorship stalled democracy. With the result that dissent was suppressed. Not only the right to dissent, but also human rights of men, women and children had become easy casualties on a massive scale. The alienated populations have taken to arms to fight the ruling groups. Investments were made to purchase arms from official and illegal sources.

Again, the Cold War competition between rival blocs led by the United States and the former Soviet Union was among the causes that set some parts of Africa on fire for many years. Congo, Angola and Horn of Africa were among the worst victims of this aspect.

10.3 FEATURES OF UN PEACEKEEPING

Peacekeeping has emerged as the most visible aspect of the UN role in maintaining international peace and security. Since 1948, there have been 56 operations in countries from East Timor to El Salvador and from Cambodia to Kosovo covering all continents except North America. It has involved nearly a million troops, police and civilians from nearly 150 countries at an estimated gross expenditure of nearly \$27.1 billion dollars and with fatality figures of 1778. At the time of writing this Unit, there are 14 missions manned by 40,000 personnel from 90 countries at a projected cost of \$2.3 billion,

The constitutional, conventional wisdom has charted two tracks for world peace, viz. peaceful action through negotiation, mediation, arbitration (Chapter VI of the Charter), and forcible action

through military and non-military measures to repulse aggressions (Chapter VII). Peacekeeping belongs to neither, and yet it has drawn strength from both tracks. Dag Hammarskjöld called this halfway house "chapter six-and-a-half".

It is useful for us to recall a few remarkable features associated with the UN peacekeeping activity. First, as a matter of rule the UN undertook peacekeeping on the basis of formal consent of the country hosting such troops. Let us give a specific example here: UN peacekeepers arrived in 1949 to supervise cease-fire along the line of control in Jammu and Kashmir only after India and Pakistan consented to their deployment. This practice was in line with the Charter principles of respect for sovereign equality. In other words, peacekeepers are by nature not invaders, but invitees. They are friends, and not foes of the governments engaged in a war. For this reason, the UN could expect the host states to comply and cooperate with the objectives of peacekeeping at work. Equally important is the fact that these operations scrupulously refrain from taking sides in a given conflict thereby keeping their integrity and impartiality beyond any shadow of doubt. This is why UN peacekeepers are "soldiers without enemies".

The international community did not entertain unduly high expectations from the UN peacekeeping operations. The concept of peacekeeping was intended to serve the limited purpose of cooling tempers on the ground by separating warring armies or factions and ensuring that they do not resume fighting. To begin with, peacekeeping is aimed not to resolve the root causes of a war, but to help create suitable conditions for reaching a settlement through peaceful means. Peacekeeping is conceived as a separate, though contributory, activity to peacemaking.

Peacekeeping under UN strictly eschews use of force. The UN peacekeeping troops were either unarmed or equipped with light weapons only to defend themselves if attacked. It was assumed that the peacekeepers' physical presence, not their muscle power, would act as a necessary deterrent against any untoward situation on the ground. Finally, these operations were manned by troops readily spared by numerous non-aligned and other countries from all geographical regions. With some exceptions, the five permanent members of the Security Council were kept out as contributors of troops because of the compulsions generated by the Cold War climate.

10.4 ACTION DURING THE COLD WAR ERA

When peacekeeping has emerged as a major activity of the United Nations during the Cold War period, it is notable that much of that activity was focused on peace in Asia, not Africa. Out of the 13 operations that UN launched during the 45 year long period of Cold War, only one paid attention to an African conflict area. This did mean that Africa had not experienced any threats to peace during those years, nor did it mean that the single peacekeeping operation was insignificant in any sense; far from it.

Indeed, peace in Africa was vitiated by the twin threats of colonialism and racism. The United Nations did not resort to peacekeeping action in addressing these threats. Rather it preferred to extend moral, political and diplomatic solidarity with the peoples and countries of Africa opposing colonial and racist policies. Accordingly, the General Assembly called for an immediate end to the colonial rule everywhere and transfer of power to native populations. Moreover, the UN justified any armed opposition (either with or without support from sympathetic countries of Africa and Asia) to end colonialism in Angola, Rhodesia, South West Africa, and Namibia etc. But, the Security Council was kept out because the Western members did not wish to disown their allies holding the colonies. But, in regard to South Africa's system of *apartheid*, the Council could not stay indifferent

for long. Coming under great pressure from the African and the Third World countries, the Council determined that continuation of *apartheid* in South Africa threatened the peace in the region. The Council joined other organs of the United Nations to ban sale of arms to the minority regime of South Africa in 1977.

The solitary peacekeeping engagement of the United Nations during the Cold War occurred in the wake of the four year long crisis in the Congo in the first half of 1960s. That single operation was widely regarded as the most challenging as also the most expensive and massive one — nearly 20,000 troops (incidentally, Indian troops constituted the largest contingent). The operation in the Congo (ONUC) succeeded in (a) putting an end to Belgian military intervention; (b) keeping the country united after forcibly overpowering the forces of secession in the mineral-rich province of Katanga; and (c) facilitating reconciliation among the warring factions competing for control of the government. But the huge expenditure brought on the world body the first major financial crisis. Doubts were raised about the impartiality of the UN peacekeepers and of the then UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld (who died in an accident), besides damaging the cause of African unity in respect of the Congo.

10.5 POST-COLD WAR PHASE: CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE

After the Cold War, the world's dependence upon the UN peacekeeping activity grew beyond imagination. Instead of a new order of peace and stability, the 1990s witnessed violence and brutality. Although wars between countries had come down, conflicts within countries had become the order of the day. Ninety-five per cent of the armed clashes belonged to the civil war category, in which one or more rebel groups were fighting against a ruling group.

These civil wars were civil in name only. Small arms were favourite weapons of the warring parties. In Africa, an estimate of 30 million small arms were in use, while West Africa sub region alone accounted for 8 million of them. More than 8 million people (many of whom were children) were killed; countless women were raped. None of them had anything to do with the warring factions. Children were forced to become killers. Almost every family had members killed, maimed, or raped because they belonged to one community or the other. In an episode of genocide in Rwanda, half a million Hutus and Tutsis were killed in four weeks in 1994. Similarly, Angola, Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia suffered casualties. More than Asia, Europe and Central America, Africa became the hub of these intra-state conflicts. The war in the Democratic Republic of Congo witnessed direct involvement of forces from neighbouring Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda. This made observers characterise the conflict as “Africa’s world war”,

The Security Council devoted the whole of January 2000 to discuss the multifarious problems of Africa. In 2003, a delegation of 15 members of the Council visited six countries facing problems of war in Africa. Furthermore, mandatory sanctions were imposed to ban sale of arms, export or import of oil or other critical commodities like diamonds, banned air travel facilities to the targeted faction leaders and so forth. In a few cases, the Council asked the willing member countries to undertake necessary military action to restore order. Somalia was the first instance in which the United States-led multinational force sought to do this job. Similar exercises followed in Rwanda, Zaire, and Sierra Leone. Now the latest example is that of Liberia in 2003,

10.5.1 Profile of Post-Cold War Peacekeeping

The main United Nations response is however in the form of the peacekeeping activity. Unlike the Cold War times during which only 13 peacekeeping missions were deployed, in a span of 15 years

since the end of the Cold War 43 missions were sent to different parts of the world. Out of these 43, the conflicts in Africa attracted 19. Some of them were huge in size, although the largest operation was sent to the states of former Yugoslavia. In the African conflict those countries, which came under UN peacekeeping were Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Western Sahara. In some cases like Angola, Sierra Leone and Somalia, more than one operation was undertaken. Angola received, for instance, four peacekeeping operations in succession but none with success. Except for three, the focus of the 19 operations was to restore peace in intrastate conflicts. While the intra-state peacekeeping was successful in Central African Republic, Mozambique and Namibia, others were not fortunate. Particularly those sent to Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Western Sahara belong to this category.

The phenomenon of intra-state peacekeeping in the post-Cold War era is remarkable for three features. First, they are assigned a wide range of activities going far beyond the traditional task of monitoring cease-fire arrangements between the warring parties. They were to assist in the process of reconciliation in pursuance of a peace agreement, clear landmines, disarm and demobilise rival groups, integrate the rebel groups into police and armed forces of the state, provide security and humanitarian assistance to civilian populations under distress, rehabilitate the returning refugees, conduct or supervise election process, and rebuild administrative and political institutions of a war-torn state. Obviously this was something more than peacekeeping and that is why a new term was used to describe these activities: UN peace support operations.

They comprised increasingly civilian officials — besides men in military uniform — specialised in different jobs like civil administration, mine clearance, humanitarian work, education, policing. Particularly police officials became a visible component of these operations to keep and restore order. While 80 per cent of them came from countries of Africa, Asia and Central America, contributions from the permanent members of the Security Council have also become a major feature of operations in Somalia, Mozambique, Namibia, etc. While Russia, France and Britain have remained relatively more committed to troops, China is very choosy among the permanent members. And the United States slipped from the most active association (up to 1993 in Somalia) to the most reluctant contributor to African peacekeeping.

Along with activities and personnel, their methods also witnessed a sea change. You may recall that peacekeeping as a concept avoided use of force during the Cold War times. But after the Cold War, a number of operations (Mozambique, Namibia, Eritrea-Ethiopia) stuck to non-forcible methods, some like those sent to Somalia and Sierra Leone were asked to use force if necessary. The second UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM-II) became the first peacekeeping operation to be established in 1993 under the coercive provision of the Charter with an authorisation to use force to protect humanitarian supplies, or punish the armed groups that threatened UN facilities and personnel and/or refused to surrender arms. Either tact or even sufficient military strength, however, did not match this muscle flexing. As a result, peacekeepers were killed or kidnapped or even robbed of weapons.

There is one more feature to peacekeeping that is relevant to African experience. In many of the peacekeeping activities the United Nations desired to make regional organisations its partners. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) were roped in again and again as junior partners in peace support activities. For example, OAU was active in Somalia, Mozambique, Eritrea-Ethiopia, just as SADC collaborated with the UN in Democratic Republic of Congo. It is difficult to conclusively observe how this partnership succeeded.

10.5.2 Problems of Peacekeeping

UN peacekeeping will not always be the best answer to every problem. Without agreement of the parties, for example, support needed on the ground for peacekeeping in Somalia was lacking. Peacekeeping deployment in such circumstances can even be counterproductive. The four United Nations deployments in Angola have shown how access to resources by warring parties can foster violence, and has highlighted the impact that international business interests can have on the success or failure of peace efforts.

Humanitarian assistance as an activity undertaken by the UN peacekeepers had brought unanticipated and ironic results. First, rival factions (in Somalia and Sierra Leone) made it difficult or impossible for them to deliver the supplies. There was also a growing tendency for combatants to divert relief supplies for their own purposes and make food a weapon to ensure loyalty of the hungry civilians. Humanitarian actors worked with peacekeepers, and independently of them, to negotiate access and defend humanitarian principles. A related point needs to be made about the inability of the UN peacekeepers to handle the situation where combatants had attempted to make non-combatants their human shield. In the area of the Great Lakes, the movement of large numbers of Rwandan refugees into neighbouring countries became a destabilising factor for those countries, as well as for the new government in Rwanda.

Delegation has not proved to be a panacea for the difficult problems facing the UN peacekeeping. Regional organisations can face political, structural, financial or planning limitations. At times the impartiality or neutrality of their member States was questioned, for historical reasons or for political or economic reasons. Nigeria's role in Sierra Leone and Liberia is a case in point.

10.6 SUMMARY

Negotiations are yielding results in negotiating accords in Somalia, Sierra Leone, and Angola of late. Side by side, the accountability for war crimes must be resolutely pursued as is happening in respect of tribunals for Rwanda and Sierra Leone to sufficiently deter crimes against humanity in future. Democratic channels for pursuing legitimate interests and expressing dissent must be protected, and political opposition accommodated in a constitutional form. Second, Africa must take good governance seriously, ensuring respect for the rule of law, strengthening democratisation, and promoting transparency and capability in public administration. Third, the international community could do its part in helping Africa especially in economic progress. The New Economic Programme for Africa's Development as well as the Debt Cancellation package for Highly Indebted Poor Countries are welcome.

10.7 EXERCISES

- 1) Mention some of the political and socio-political causes of conflict in Africa.
- 2) Identify the inter-linkages between the external and internal problems that threaten peace in Africa,
- 3) Discuss the significance of the Congo crisis for the UN peacekeeping?
- 4) What are the salient features of the post-Cold War peacekeeping in Africa?
- 5) Give examples of successful and not so successful peacekeeping operations of the United Nations in Africa since the end of the cold war.
- 6) Discuss any two of the major problems that UN peacekeeping in Africa suffered from.