

LITERATURE RESEARCH ON THE ROLE OF CIVILIANS IN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this article is on the role of civilians in peacekeeping operations. In other words, what part does civilians play in peacekeeping operations? The article also focuses on the rationale of using civilians in peacekeeping. The discussion examines the benefits and the limitations associated with the involvement of civilians in peacekeeping. The paper argues that an eclectic/combined approach to peacekeeping is the most effective and efficient one.

Keywords: peacekeeping, civilian, peace-making, conflict

1.0 Introduction

“Peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice, of law, of order—in short, of government (Albert Einstein, quoted in Ayindo and Jenner, 2008).

‘War-to-peace’ transition and ‘post-conflict’ are not easily defined. Indeed, conflict prevails in all societies – both rich and poor, and the resolution of conflict is the business of everyday life. Conflict turns violent when the mechanisms for its peaceful resolution break down. Success in post-conflict recovery can, therefore, be measured by the degree to which it pushes violent conflict into peaceful channels in which it can be expressed and eventually resolved’ (Addison & Brueck, 2009).

Over the years, peacekeeping has changed from the traditional, primarily military model of observing ceasefires and the separation of forces after inter-state wars, to incorporate a multi-

dimensional model involving military, civilian, and police. There are a wide variety of civilian components and functions in UN peacekeeping operations on both the substantive and support sides. The type of civilian substantive components that are in a peacekeeping operation depends on the mandate of the mission. Traditional peacekeeping operations are primarily military operations and therefore have a limited number of substantive civilian components. In multidimensional peacekeeping operations, there are many different civilian substantive components (POTI,2014).

1.1 Purpose and Relevance

In an endeavour to influence policy-making, the central purpose of this paper is to bring out the role of civilians in peacekeeping. The rationale and benefits of civilian peacekeeping are also highlighted. In an effort to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of civilian peacekeeping, its weaknesses as cited by another author were also examined. The paper is of significance to various stakeholders in peacekeeping, inter alia United Nations (UN), African Union(AU), SADC, ECOWAS, Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), civil and non-governmental organisations(NGOs) that are involved in peacekeeping, among others.

1.2 Methodology

Secondary data consist of existing data sets, reports, and documents, usually compiled by other persons or organizations, and often for purposes other than those of the present analysis. The study was primarily an online desk research. Books, print journals, magazines and newspapers were also used to compile this paper. A desk study can save time and resources directed toward primary data collection in the field.

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.3.1 The Concept of Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping as a concept therefore is the interposition of a neutral international force in a conflict area to create a buffer between warring factions in a conflict. According to Onoja, peacekeeping operations “are essentially a practical mechanism developed by the UN to contain and control armed conflicts and to facilitate their resolution by peaceful means”(Oxfam,2001). It is therefore a means to an end, and that end is conflict resolution.

Boutros-Ghali, further defines peace keeping as “the deployment of a UN presence in the field, hitherto with the consent of all parties concerned, normally involving military or police personnel and frequently civilians as well”. Peacekeeping in this context, is a technique that expands the possibilities for both the prevention of conflict and the making of peace. Hence peacekeeping as a third contingency approach to conflict management, according to Bassey is “one of the novel techniques” of “Conflict Diplomacy” which has gained wide currency in the contemporary international era (Onumajuru, 2005).

Peacekeeping as a concept describes one of the three complementary strategies for tackling violent conflict (Galtung, 1969). Peacekeeping’s objective is to reduce the overt violence of the parties involved while peace-making is aimed at bringing the parties together to reach an agreement and peace-building is an attempt to tackle the root causes of conflict(Wallis, 2010).

Civilian Peacekeeping, also referred to as unarmed peacekeeping, is a new term, and involves unarmed individuals placing themselves in conflict situations in an attempt to reduce inter-group violence (Schirch, 2006). Today's multidimensional peacekeeping operations are called upon not only to maintain peace and security, but also to facilitate the political process, protect civilians, assist in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants; support the organization of elections, protect and promote human rights and assist in restoring the rule of law.

1.3.2 The Legal Basis of Peacekeeping

The United Nations(UN) charter is the principal document for all UN work. The UN was formed with the mandate to maintain international peace and security. Therefore, peacekeeping, although not explicitly provided for in the charter (Carrière, 2010, Liu,1999, Woodhouse and Duffey, 2000), has evolved to become one of the main tools used by UN to achieve this purpose. The charter gives UN Security Council (UNSC) primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, and peacekeeping operations are deployed on the basis of mandates from UNSC(UN Peacekeeping). Although peacekeeping is

not specifically mentioned in the UN Charter, the legal basis for UN peacekeeping is contained in Chapter VI and Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

1.3.3 Why Use Civilians in Peacekeeping?

According to Levine (2013), civilians have the potential to defuse potentially violent situations, make connections, create and maintain support networks. Further to that, civilians are sources of information for the peacekeeper's own work. At the same time, military interventions, unlike civilian missions do not lead to prolonged peace but only to new forms of conflicts which results in increased numbers of deaths, displacements, property and infrastructural destruction and other human sufferings related to military interventions.

The presence of civilians in peacekeeping can also:

- help to reduce conflict and confrontation;
- improve access and support for local people;
- provide role models for men and women in the community;
- provide a greater sense of security to local populations, including women and children;
- broaden the skill set available within a peacekeeping mission.
- empowering people in the host community;
- addressing specific needs of civilian people in the aftermath of the conflict;
- helping make the peacekeeping force approachable to people in the community.

According to Wallis (2010), civilians or civilian peacekeepers can apply moral, political, legal, economic and social pressures which can influence armed individuals and commanders prevent violence. A point in case is Liberia where the Liberian women organised to promote peace. They met with warlords, protested and organised strikes and sit-ins and attended international peace meetings (Levine, 2013).

1.3.4 The Role of Civilians in Peacekeeping

➤ The Civil affairs Component in United Nations

According to United Nations Peacekeeping (May 2016), Civil Affairs is one of the largest civilian components in UN Peacekeeping. As of January 2015, there are about 950 Civil Affairs Officers in 12 UN Field Missions worldwide. Its purpose is to strengthen social and civic conditions for countrywide peace. Civil Affairs components facilitate the implementation of peacekeeping mandates sub-nationally and work to strengthen social and civic conditions necessary for peace. Civil Affairs Officers are often the primary interface between the mission and local interlocutors. A Civil Affairs policy directive from the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support sets out three core roles that are performed by these components, depending on the mandate of the mission and the evolving situation on the ground.

(a) Cross-mission representation, monitoring and facilitation at the local level

Civil Affairs Officers

- monitor the progress of the peace process and mandate implementation at the local level;
- they provide mission leadership with information about the local environment,
- carry out conflict analysis and early warning about local conflict, including in relation to efforts to protect civilians, and
- help ensure regional and local considerations are integrated into national negotiations or priority-setting processes.

(b) Confidence-building, conflict management and support to reconciliation

- Through this role, Civil Affairs officers actively support the development of social and civic conditions conducive to sustainable peace and popular engagement and confidence in the peace process. Civil Affairs officers usually undertake these activities in partnership with other mission components as well as UN agencies, local and international partners.

(b). Support to the restoration and extension of state authority

- The need to stabilize weak states emerged more and more strongly as a critical requirement to keeping and building peace. This has therefore become an area of work in which Civil Affairs Officers have been increasingly engaged through the support to state institution and to good governance practices at the sub-national level.

Other tasks (Tshiband, 2010) carried out in civilian peacekeeping are:

- election monitoring;
- ceasefire monitoring;
- establishment and monitoring of peace zones;
- humanitarian and relief assistance; and
- the re-establishment of the rule of law.

However, all these functions have been undertaken by UN and regional peacekeepers, both civilian and uniformed.

According to UN Peacekeeping (2016), women civilians can also play the following roles,

- interviewing survivors of gender-based violence;
- mentoring female cadets at police and military academies;
- interacting with women in societies where women are prohibited from speaking to men.

1.3.5 Criticisms of Civilian Peacekeeping

In her report titled, *Civilian peacekeeping: Preventing Violence, Making Space for Democracy*, Schirchwrote, “...inter-positioning in today’s form of highly technological warfare would entail high risk to the civilian peacekeepers....it is doubtful if civilians could even enter into the frontlines of a combat zone in today’s warfare...several of the

organizations that tried to interposition during the first Gulf War and the war in the former Yugoslavia were not able to gain access to the areas where they hoped to place themselves between the armed groups”.

Cited in Schirch(2006), Moser-Puangsuwan&Weber(2000) conclude that, *“An assessment of the viability of nonviolent unarmed strategic large-scale interpositional peacekeeping, based on an analysis of previous attempts, and measured in terms of physical effectiveness, seems to suggest that the concept is not a viable one.” They conclude that civilian peacekeeping should focus on small-scale tactical intervention through nonviolent witness and accompaniment initiatives.*

Furthermore, Schirch wrote that, *“There are no recent examples of the effectiveness of civilian peacekeeping in wars of high intensity, with large-scale weaponry, massive numbers of troops, widespread and decentralized fighting. It is hard to imagine how civilian peacekeeping would have worked once overt and widespread violence began in Rwanda, for example. The few international groups that did try to maintain a presence and intervene to stop violence were essentially ineffective, as the groups engaged in the violence had little concern for international outrage or the Western passports of the civilians. The leverage available to the civilian peacekeepers within this context was insufficient”*

Schirch concluded that, *“The most recent civilian peacekeeping successes have been in situations of sporadic fighting, in situations where there are human rights violations against people or groups that can be accompanied, or in a situation of a ceasefire where the violence can be prevented rather than stopped...”*

The choice of the above snippets by Lisa Schirch (2006) criticising civilian peacekeeping are not only for academic interest but are also meant for in-depth analysis of this new form of peacekeeping with a view to improving and refining it. Despite the above challenges, civilian peacekeeping remain a critical component among other peacekeeping components that can effectively contribute to the achievement of peace. Basing on the above critical arguments, this paper concludes that civilian peacekeeping is not compatible for all forms/situations of conflict, therefore, it can be effective in some situations as well as totally fail in others. Further to that, an eclectic/combined approach to peacekeeping is suggested as ideal where

different types of peacekeeping are implemented concurrently or at different succeeding stages to complement one another. One of the major advantages of a combined approach is that it is less reductionist and more likely to address more facets of a problem, in this case, conflict.

1.4 Conclusion

According to Colonel Joe Muzvidziwa, Director of SADC Regional Peacekeeping Training Centre (RPTC),

“Civilians are key in peace support mission because they manage the political and humanitarian offices and their role is to advise other players on how to handle the whole process” (Phiri, 2006).

This article has tried to argue that civilian peacekeeping plays a critical role in conflict situations. The rationale behind civilian peacekeeping is that it is an efficient instrument in dealing with potential violence in the volatile time after a conflict. The lines of difference between conflict prevention, peace-making, peacekeeping, peace building and peace enforcement have become increasingly blurred. Peace operations are rarely limited to one type of activity. While UN peacekeeping operations are, in principle, deployed to support the implementation of a ceasefire or peace agreement, they are often required to play an active role in peace-making efforts and may also be involved in early peace building activities (UN, 2016). In other words, this literature survey tried, partially, to give an answer to the executive director of Life & Peace Institute Peter Brune’s question which he posited in the foreword of a report entitled *Civilian Peacekeeping: Preventing Violence and Making Space for Democracy*, written by Lisa Schirch (2006), US-based peace researcher:

“Under what circumstances can a non-armed third party presence in violent surroundings make a difference, through a coercive exercise of power, based on a conviction that it is not through arms but through other means that the conflict is successfully dealt with so that peace can be built?”

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