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Peacekeeping Within African Regime Complexity

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22 April 2016

Authors Note: This article summarises key findings of my book Malte Brosig (2015) Cooperative Peacekeeping in Africa: Exploring Regime Complexity. London & New York: Routledge.

Introduction

Peacekeeping enjoys an unprecedented popularity amongst policymakers at the moment. At no point in history have there been more peacekeepers deployed worldwide. The United Nations (UN) and regional organisations are currently deploying more than 100,000 troops and police in missions around the globe but most are located in Africa. The challenges individual missions are facing are well-discussed among experts. Much of the relevant literature focusses on dos and don'ts of peacekeeping practices. Regardless of individual cases we can observe the emergence of a larger inter-organisational peacekeeping system which I refer to as African peacekeeping regime complex in which the most relevant organisations such as the UN, the African Union (AU), Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and European Union (EU) are intimately inter-connected. Thus, the challenges actors are facing are not only individual ones and so solutions to these challenges are increasingly based on multi-actor coordination. How the peacekeeping regime complex emerged and how actors are positioned within it will be explored in this contribution.

Peacekeeping Today

Modern peacekeeping is confronted with high expectations and an enormous task complexity. Peacekeeping activities reach far beyond ceasefire monitoring, and also involve countering rebel and terror groups, protecting the civilian

population, disarming combatants, supporting elections, reforming the security apparatus, state building and engaging in humanitarian relief. In sum, the expectation is that peacekeepers are not simply administering fragile peace, but also working to prevent a relapse into conflict by addressing its root causes. Naturally, these activities are conducted under considerable insecurity in a fragile environment where conflict has not often ceased, but is instead suppressed. Progress is uncertain and backlashes are likely.

Zambian peacekeepers from the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) patrol streets lined with looted items awaiting collection in Abyei, the main town of the disputed Abyei area on the border of Sudan and newly independent South Sudan. In a statement yesterday, the United Nations strongly condemned the burning and looting currently being perpetrated by armed elements in the area, following the seizure of Abyei town by Sudanese Government troops on 20 March.
Zambian peacekeepers from the United Nations Mission in Sudan. Image by United Nations Photo via Flickr.

The demand for peacekeepers and the existing complexity and high expectations peacekeeping is confronted with in practice lead to an overburdening of single actors. For the African continent, we can identify a group of relevant organisations which play a central role within the African peacekeeping regime complex. These are the UN, AU, RECs and EU. None of these actors are capable of dominating the regime complex fully. They all are facing the harsh realities of resource scarcity. Resources can be material goods (financial, military) or social kinds like competences or political (in) capacities or deployment doctrines.

Examples of this resource scarcity and its effects are easy to find. While the UN remains the most essential actor, it does not have command over the

resources which would allow it to outperform regional organisations. This becomes very clear when looking at deployment times and/or the issue of peace enforcement. With its heavy bureaucracy in the background, the UN's response times are on average around six months which is far from a rapid response. Issues of peace enforcement and counter-terrorism are also politically controversial within the UN and thus the UN's missions find it difficult to engage in this kind of activity. In practice, there remains a considerable gap in the UN response to severe crises.

On the part of African actors, much has been achieved within the last decade. An African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) has been erected which builds on close cooperation between the AU's headquarters in Ethiopia and RECs. Considerable efforts have been made to establish the African Standby Force (ASF). Indeed, the AU is now actively involved in practically all emerging conflicts on the continent. Still, it falls short of being able to independently respond to crises in a sustainable and comprehensive manner. The design of the ASF which consists of around 25,000 troops only makes up a minority of all deployments to the African continent. While the AU is willing to deploy in situations where the UN is reluctant to do so, the AU's resource constraints are significant. The lack of funding is a compelling example. Despite efforts of the Commission chair to reduce external dependencies, the peacekeeping budget is predominately being financed by international donors. AU peacekeeping missions are not sustainable to maintain and can only operate with much reduced task complexity. Thus, because of resource constraints, they are neither long-term nor comprehensive in nature.

In the case of the EU, the situation is different. It is the most well-resourced organisation of all but does not have a global mandate. While the EU has

deployed around 17 missions to Africa since 2003, these have been rather small in ambition, scale and duration. Most missions train security forces, but only a few are actively engaging in operational peacekeeping. This does not result from an absence of resources but is wanted politically.

How the Multi-Actor Approach is Shaping Modern Peace Operations

Given the very visible limitation of each single actor, it is hardly surprising that peacekeeping today is a multi-actor game forming a regime complex. A regime complex can be characterised as a form of decentralised and non-hierarchically organised governance. Actors are overlapping with regard to their membership and/or operational ambit and are tightly interconnected which makes it difficult to decompose the system into individual units. What a regime complex constitutes is mostly defined in terms of the relationship of its constituent parts which are constantly interacting with one another. In the case of peacekeeping in Africa, we can detect such a system.

In the overwhelming number of cases, we can observe forms of cooperative peacekeeping in which actors are pooling their resources. The most pervasive forms of cooperation are the sequential and co-deployment of troops. This has also led to a division of labour and institutional specialisation between the involved actors. For example, the AU often functions as a first-deployer, sending out troops in situations which are not consolidated and remain hostile and fragile. These deployments which are rather short-term oriented aim to prepare the ground for a larger more comprehensive and longer-term engagement from the UN. The UN's response is often slower but more sustainable and also covers complex peace building tasks and stays in countries for an extended period of time. The role of the EU is less ambitious, but not less important. In the operational peacekeeping theatre, the EU contributed a high number of

missions which are targeted and confined in terms of deployment times (short-term) and tasks (usually training missions). They aim from the beginning not to take over comprehensive tasks but are designed to fill in functional niches other actors leave. Financially, the EU is one of the main donors for AU peacekeeping missions. Since 2004, the EU's African Peace Facility has provided €1.9bn for institutional capacity building and peacekeeping missions. Recent peacekeeping missions deployed to the Central African Republic (CAR) and Mali broadly follow this track of interaction.

However, the exchange of resources between the AU-EU-UN which forms the backbone of the peacekeeping regime complex is not a simple functional mechanism. The exchange of resources is, for example, also influenced by peacekeeping doctrines. These are not automatically complementary. In the case of the AU and UN, the AU's exit strategy is not necessarily compatible with the UN's entry strategy. While the AU deploys in situations of continuing hostilities and aims at stabilising the situation, the UN takes a more conservative approach aiming to deploy only in situations where at least a ceasefire is in place. What happens if the AU stabilisation efforts do not lead to tangible progress can be seen in Somalia. Although the AU has called for UN take over since the deployment of AMISOM in 2007, no UN takeover occurred.

Doctrinal divisions also exist with regards to robust peacekeeping in already deployed missions. While the AU and African states often accept that within peacekeeping missions the use of force is sometimes needed to actively deter and encounter rebels or terrorists, this view is mostly not shared by the UN and EU. As a consequence, active peace enforcement in cases of deployed UN missions (CAR, Mali, DRC) tend to be outsourced. In case of the DRC, a Force

Intervention Brigade (FIB) was set up and staffed by African countries or France continued its military operations hunting down terrorists in Mali.

Apart from questions of doctrinal complementarity, the supply and demand for resources varies significantly between actors. An organisation which is stronger on the supply side can chose how to design its involvement in peacekeeping while an organisation which is experiencing a strong demand but little supply is in an inferior position. This can be seen when comparing the EU and AU. The EU is in the position to provide what it deems adequate (many small scale targeted missions), the AU is in the complete opposite situation. It cannot maintain longer-term missions on its own and relies both on external funding and operational handover to the UN.

Conclusion

Modern peacekeeping operates in a multi-actor environment which displays decentred governance structures to which we can refer as a regime complex. Apart from the fact that the UN Security Council bears a general responsibility for peace, there is no overarching or strict hierarchy between the UN-AU-EU. Despite the absence of externally delegated roles within the regime complex, assumed roles emerged as a consequence of individual institutional resource scarcity, doctrinal compatibility and the size of demand vs supply of resources. Certainly politics is not missing in this system. There is no formally agreed script according to which organisations can be expected to act and thus the exact mode of interaction varies between cases. Domestic conflict dynamics leave their imprint too.

In the end, taking an inter-organisational perspective to peacekeeping is not a trivial under-taking because it constitutes a form of global governance which

transcends the individual organisation. While we have long accepted that the classical nation state has lost parts of its domestic sovereignty to the forces of globalisation we also have to recognise that the same is true for international organisations. In this regard actorness and governance qualities do not exclusively rest in actors themselves but also in how they organise interaction with one another. The peacekeeping regime complex is one example and one that is shaping the lives of millions who live in some of the most vulnerable situations.

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