



U.N. PEACEKEEPING Operations in Africa

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By Eben Barlow

Since fielding the first United Nations (U.N.) peacekeeping mission in 1948, the world has witnessed the deployment of about 63 U.N. peacekeeping operations. Since 1989 the U.N.'s Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) has deployed 18 missions to Africa.

By November 2006 the DPKO's deployment had reached an all-time high with 81,000 military and police personnel and 15,000 civilians. With 18 active missions in progress at that time, it was estimated that the DPKO would possibly require a budget of U.S. \$7 billion.¹ By 2010 this figure will have increased significantly, particularly in Africa.

THE U.N.'S DPKO AFRICAN MISSIONS

When the DPKO's African missions are tabulated, one can gain some perspective of the scope of the U.N.'s involvement in Africa. Table 1 below chronicles these operations.

TABLE 1

Official Abbrev.	Mission Name	Mission Start	Mission End	In Countries	Mandate according to U.N. Charter Chapter
ONUC	United Nations Operation In The Congo	July 1960	June 1964	Congo	VI from the beginning, later added Chapter VII authorization
UNAVEM I	United Nations Angola Verification Mission I	December 1988	May 1991	Angola	Chapter VI authorization only
UNTAG	United Nations Transition Assistance Group	April 1989	March 1990	Namibia	Chapter VI authorization only
MINURSO	United Nations Mission For The Referendum In Western Sahara	April 1991	ongoing	Western Sahara	Chapter VI authorization only
UNAVEM II	United Nations Angola Verification Mission Ii	May 1991	February 1995	Angola	Chapter VI authorization only
UNOSOM I	United Nations Operation In Somalia I	April 1992	March 1993	Somalia	Chapter VI authorization only*
ONUMOZ	United Nations Operation In Mozambique	December 1992	December 1994	Mozambique	Chapter VI authorization only
UNOSOM II	United Nations Operation In Somalia Ii	March 1993	March 1995	Somalia	Chapter VI and VII authorization from the beginning
UNOMUR	United Nations Observer Mission Uganda-Rwanda	June 1993	September 1994	Rwanda, Uganda	Chapter VI authorization only
UNAMIR	United Nations Assistance Mission For Rwanda	October 1993	March 1996	Rwanda	Chapter VI authorization only
UNOMIL	United Nations Observer Mission In Liberia	September 1993	September 1997	Liberia	Chapter VI authorization only
UNASOG	United Nations Aouzou Strip Observer Group	May 1994	June 1994	Chad, Libya	Chapter VI authorization only
UNAVEM III	United Nations Angola Verification Mission Iii	February 1995	June 1997	Angola	Chapter VI authorization only
MONUA	United Nations Observer Mission In Angola	June 1997	February 1999	Angola	Chapter VI authorization only
MINURCA	United Nations Mission In The Central African Republic	April 1998	February 2000	Central African Republic	Chapter VI authorization only
UNOMSIL	United Nations Observer Mission In Sierra Leone	July 1998	October 1999	Sierra Leone	Chapter VI authorization only
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission In Sierra Leone	October 1999	December 2005	Sierra Leone	VI from the beginning, later added Chapter VII authorization
MONUC	United Nations Organization Mission In The Democratic Republic Of The Congo	November 1999	ongoing	Democratic Republic of Congo	VI from the beginning, later added Chapter VII authorization
UNMEE	United Nations Mission In Ethiopia And Eritrea	July 2000	ongoing	Ethiopia, Eritrea	Chapter VI authorization only
UNMIL	United Nations Mission In Liberia	September 2003	ongoing	Liberia	Chapter VI and VII authorization from the beginning
UNOCI	United Nations Operation In Côte d'Ivoire	April 2004	ongoing	Côte d'Ivoire	Chapter VI and VII authorization from the beginning
ONUB	United Nations Mission In Burundi	June 2004	ongoing	Burundi	Chapter VI and VII authorization from the beginning
UNMIS	United Nations Mission In The Sudan	March 2005	ongoing	Sudan	Chapter VI and VII authorization from the beginning

Source: Based on data published by U.N. (<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/index.asp>, 5.5.2006) *UNOSOM was established to monitor the ceasefire in Mogadishu and to escort deliveries of humanitarian aid. It later worked together with the Unified Task Force (UNITAF—contingents from 24 countries led by the United States) in an effort to establish a safe environment for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The U.N. Security Council used Chapter VII to authorize the UNITAF operation. (Vladimír Kváča: Jan Masaryk Centre of International Studies, University of Economics, Prague)



UN soldiers. ©istockphoto.com/Sean_Warren

DEFINING SUCCESS

Success can only be achieved or claimed if a mission has succeeded in bringing about and maintaining peace, allowing for nation-building to take place in an environment where the local population can live with the knowledge that they are secure.

However, in order to assess the success of the DPKO's missions, one needs to analyze differences between a DPKO

mission and an alternate option exercised by an African government that has experienced the DPKO's deployment in its country.

THE SIERRA LEONE DEBACLE

Sierra Leone has had firsthand experience of a devastating, cruel, and vicious civil war. With a civil war already in progress when he seized power,

TABLE 2

Organization	Costs	Result
United Nations (UNAMSIL ¹) 1998–2005	U.S. \$600 million per year (2001)	Military coup ousts elected president. RUF ² over-runs Freetown. Thousands of civilians killed. Damage estimated at millions of dollars. Thousands become refugees. U.N. considers UNAMSIL to be most successful U.N.-mission.
Executive Outcomes 1995–1997	U.S. \$31 million per year (approx.)	RUF defeated on battlefield. Thousands of civilian lives saved. Child-soldiers demobilized. Government gains control of diamond fields and rutile mines. Food convoys travel in safety. RUF signs cease-fire. Refugees return home to SL. Elections held.
International Community	U.S. \$60 million per year to maintain refugees outside of Sierra Leone	Thousands of people prevented from dying of malnutrition.
World Food Programme and other U.N. agencies and NGOs	?	?

From: Barlow, Eben, *Executive Outcomes, Against all Odds*, Galago, 2007.

¹ UNAMSIL arrived in Sierra Leone after EO left the country, ostensibly to "take over and maintain peace." ² Revolutionary United Front

Captain Valentine Strasser's calls to the United Nations for assistance were ignored. He subsequently contracted a private military company (PMC) known as Executive Outcomes (EO) to come to the rescue of Sierra Leone. EO arrived in Sierra Leone in April 1995 and when the company left in January 1997 because of massive international pressure, the rebel forces that had terrorized the country were all but destroyed. The United Nations then stepped in.

In assessing the U.N.'s role in terms of cost and achievement, one gains perspective by comparing it against EO. This is illustrated in Table 2.

Whereas there can be no doubt that the United Nations has the potential to be an instrument for peace and stability, there are certainly grave doubts about how this organization went about its business in Sierra Leone.

As Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, commented on the situation in Sierra Leone:

Diplomatic pressure, expressions of international outrage, and U.N. missions have all failed. People die, refugees flee, children starve, societies disintegrate.

The only strategy that has worked is military force. In 1995, Sierra Leone's

When the genocide in Rwanda erupted in early April 1994, the United Nations had had ample warning of what was to come. Indeed, Kofi Annan had ordered that no action be taken.³



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government was tottering before an offensive of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The regime hired the firm Executive Outcomes, made up of South African mercenaries, which routed the RUF.

But one requirement of the political “settlement” pushed by the United States was to send Executive Outcomes home. U.N. peacekeepers proved to be dismal replacements.²

THE RWANDA ERUPTION

When the genocide in Rwanda erupted in early April 1994, the United Nations had had ample warning of what was to come. Indeed, Kofi Annan had ordered that no action be taken.³

The case of Rwanda becomes even more tragic when considering that the United Nations approached EO around 12 April 1994. The request by the United Nations was to rapidly

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TABLE 3

Organization	Costs	Result
U.N.	U.S. \$600 million for 6 months (approx.)	Hundreds of thousands of civilians slaughtered (approx. 500,000)
U.S. Military Ops Distant Runner and Support Hope	U.S. \$147.8 million for 6 months	Rescue of 148 Americans and 82 "others" 500,000 ¹ people killed in genocide
Executive Outcomes	Budgeted U.S. \$100 million for 6 months	Rejected by U.N. as too expensive
France	Unknown	See U.N. Result
Belgium	Unknown	See U.N. Result

From: Barlow, Eeben, *Executive Outcomes, Against all Odds*, Galago, 2007. ¹Later estimates have put the civilians killed at 800,000.

put together a force and intervene in Rwanda. The company's proposal was immediately rejected by the United Nations for being "too expensive." It also needs to be mentioned that EO had to make provision for the purchase of all of its equipment, including all weapons, ammunition, medical supplies, signals equipment, vehicles, and aircraft. Table 3 chronicles the relevant operational costs and their achievements.

Indeed, the United Nations itself released reports documenting two of its "worst stumbles".

According to these confessions, U.N. peacekeepers in Rwanda stood by as Hutu slaughtered some 800,000 Tutsi. In Bosnia . . . its blue-helmeted troops were used as hostages by the Serbs to deter a military response from the West. Presumably, Secretary-General Kofi Annan—who was head of the U.N.'s peacekeeping department at the time—hopes that an institutional mea culpa now will wipe the slate clean and allow the organization to play a more vigorous role in the future.⁴

From a strictly operational point of view, the U.N.'s peacekeeping operations are nothing short of disastrous.



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MILITARY SUCCESS OR MILITARY BLUNDER?

The above comparisons illustrate certain weaknesses in the DPKO's makeup and mandate.

From a strictly operational point of view, the U.N.'s peacekeeping operations are nothing short of disastrous. With a lack of strategy, poorly defined and unstructured operational missions, inadequately trained troops, and apparently dubious leadership, these operations tend to prolong the conflicts instead of shorten them. As the conflicts deepen, the United Nations appears to attempt to rectify the failure by increasing its troop levels. Thus, "mission creep" sets in—and the costs of maintaining these operations soar.

In addition to the above criticisms and the excessive costs to fund and maintain these missions, the allegations of bias, rampant U.N. sexual assaults, cover-up, and the inability to secure peace are synonymous with U.N. peacekeeping missions.⁵

Countries such as Angola, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, Somalia, and Sudan simply add to the long list of U.N. failures. In none of

these countries did the United Nations bring about peace, resolve the conflict, stop the killing, or even partially resolve the underlying tensions and conflicts. Yet, even failures are lauded by the United Nations as achievements.

The United Nations states that its peacekeeping "continues to evolve, both conceptually and operationally, to meet new challenges and political realities. Faced with the rising demand for increasingly complex peace operations . . . The Organization has worked vigorously to strengthen its capacity to manage and sustain field operations and, thus, contribute to the most important function of the United Nations—maintaining international peace and security."⁶

Whereas these claims may seem reasonable on paper, the reality in the field is disconcerting. As the organization involves itself with its own troop surges and ever-growing budgets, people continue to be displaced and slaughtered, thugs and criminals continue to control entire regions, and the human disasters continue to grow. The result is a lack of confidence in these missions by the local population.

But the root cause of these failures



Army camp in the Sudan.
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Peacekeeping has been pushed to the wall. There is a sense across the system that this is a mess—overburdened, underfunded, overstretched.

seems to escape the United Nations. Perhaps it is viewed as politically incorrect to assess the real reasons for failure or perhaps it is that the United Nations wishes to see itself as an organization that will only involve itself in “keeping peace.” However, to speak of keeping peace when there is no peace is a fallacy.

To keep peace there needs to be an end to hostilities. The conflict needs to be resolved—either politically or militarily—and the antagonists need to accept that peace.

ARMED INTERVENTION

As retired Australian General John Sanderson once remarked, “You either go to war or go home.”⁷ In dealing with civil wars and failed states, armed intervention remains the only option available to force the antagonist to the negotiation table or destroy the antagonist on the battlefield once talks have failed.

The U.N.’s DPKO has the legitimacy to intervene in conflicts but it does not have the ability to end them.

As a continent, Africa will continue to haunt the DPKO. As journalist Neil MacFarquhar noted recently:

Among the most noticeable failures in recent months: the inability of troops in Congo and the Darfur region of Sudan to stop the violence that is killing civilians, the difficulty in finding enough

troops for either of those missions, and the unwillingness of any nation to lead a possible mission in Somalia.

In Congo in December, a contingent of 100 peacekeepers that was less than a mile away did not intervene in a rebel massacre that human rights investigators said killed 150 people; the peacekeepers reported that they were short of equipment and manpower and lacked the intelligence capacity to figure out what was happening in the nearby town.⁸

Such excuses do nothing to enhance the image of the U.N. DPKO’s competence.

The international community will never accept a U.N.-controlled and led “standing force” to ensure an end to hostilities or conflict. Many nations will refuse to put their forces under U.N. commanders. Others have their doubts about such a force intervening in conflicts across the globe. While this uncertainty continues, Africa burns. This was alluded to by Bruce Jones, the director of the Center on International Cooperation at New York:

Peacekeeping has been pushed to the wall. There is a sense across the system that this is a mess—overburdened, underfunded, overstretched.

Has the time not come for the United Nations to accept its inability in the field and acknowledge its failures? Are



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the claims of being underfunded not a direct result of using ill-trained troops from poorer countries—and in the documented case of Bulgaria, hardened criminals dressed in military uniforms—as opposed to professional soldiers? Is it not the time to begin vetting and training troops correctly prior to mission deployment?

Doug Brooks of the International Peace Operations Association said:

The much maligned South African PMC, 'Executive Outcomes' (EO), actually brought two African wars to an end, and they did it cheaper and

faster than would have been possible using multinational organisations. In Sierra Leone, ECOMOG (the Cease-Fire Monitoring Group of ECOWAS) spent hundreds of millions of dollars over several years, losing a war that EO had won in ten months for only 35 million dollars. Before that, in Angola, the UN spent 1.5 billion dollars in its failed attempt to solidify a peace under the Lusaka Protocol that EO had created in a year's fighting, for only 80 million dollars. In both cases, the PMC had done the hard combat, but the subsequent peace was lost because the international organisations were unable to provide the effective post-conflict security necessary to establish a long-term settlement. In both cases, EO. . . could easily have continued to provide the necessary security that would have permanently ended those wars.

. . . African conflicts are complex and nuanced. It is unrealistic to expect PMCs to solve the larger political issues. A PMC can stop the killing and provide the essential window of peace that will

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allow reconciliation and free and fair self-determination . . . Ultimately, only Africans can provide the enduring political solutions to Africa's seemingly endless wars.

Nevertheless, of all the tools currently available to end organized African violence, only PMCs are capable of quickly bringing peace to the African continent. They should not be dismissed as mere 'mercenaries.' They have proven their ability to push low-intensity conflicts to settlements, and they have shown their willingness to enter seemingly intractable conflicts, where Western powers dare not tread. They have a unique and remarkable ability to act as a force multiplier, working with local forces and nullifying problems of scale. PMCs can be used to pacify areas of ethnic tension, provide peacekeeping services, oversee truce monitoring operations, protect NGO programs, undertake

humanitarian rescue operations, and if necessary, even conclude wars decisively.⁹

A closer look into the U.N.'s claims that it achieved success in Namibia, Angola, Sierra Leone, and elsewhere reveals that its claims are unfounded. Whereas its presence in those countries cannot be disputed, it took the intervention of other forces on the battlefield to end the conflicts—under the watchful gaze of the United Nations. That, in itself, is an indictment of the DPKO. ●

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mr. Barlow is a former special operations officer and intelligence officer of the South African Defence Force. The author was also the founder of the private military company, Executive Outcomes and author of the book "Executive Outcomes" (Galago Publishing, 2007).

ENDNOTES

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