

SOUTH AFRICA'S PARTICIPATION IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC AND DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO PEACE MISSIONS: A COMPARISON

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Abstract

After the peacekeeping tragedy in the Central African Republic (CAR) in March 2013, South Africa's participation in peacekeeping missions on the African continent is under investigation. Military personnel of the South African National Defence Force recently took part in both conventional and unconventional, asymmetric warfare in two peace missions, one in the CAR and one in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In the CAR a unilateral military agreement between states existed, while in the DRC a United Nations (UN) mandate for multilateral offensive peacekeeping was authorised. The rationale for South Africa's participation in African missions is important while the country is serving as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Its role as one of the leading nations in Africa to deploy peacekeepers is central to its foreign policy. The article focuses on contrasting operations, and diverse challenges such as the authorisation of mandates, funding, logistics and shortcomings in asymmetric training for irregular "new wars" where peacekeepers are required to protect civilians in countries to which they owe little allegiance. Lessons learnt from the widely differing operational experiences in these recent peace missions are discussed.

Keywords: intrastate conflicts, weak states, peacekeeping collaboration, unilateral and multilateral agreements

INTRODUCTION

This history of Africa has been characterised by external influences such as Western colonial rule, and, since the 1960s, the processes of independence in most states.

Intrastate conflicts between weak African states and non-state actors concerning the continent's natural resources have been common. The pursuit of mineral wealth in the form of diamonds, gold, uranium and cobalt and the economic offsets thereof have given rise to instability and disorder. The year 1989 saw the fall of the Berlin Wall, signalling the demise of communism and the Cold War and an end to the ideological confrontation between the East and West. However, historic disputes kept hidden during the Cold War resurfaced and were reignited violently, as small wars were regarded as by-products of old grievances (Cilliers and Schönemann 2013, 2). Consequently, the changing nature of international politics and subsequent conflicts led to an increasing demand for peacekeepers from the 1990s onwards. Africa is the scene of two-thirds of global conflict, hosting the majority of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping forces. Over 50 peace operations have been deployed to 18 African countries since 2000 (Williams 2013, 1).

Porous borders continue to create difficulties, as most insurgents or non-state actors simply walk across to neighbouring countries without hindrance. Some insurgents have transnational characteristics, and move relatively easily between states. Moreover, the nature of conflicts has changed considerably, "with the lines between criminal and political violence becoming increasingly blurred" (Cilliers and Schönemann 2013, 2). For the purpose of this article these unconventional acts of armed violence, such as guerrilla attacks, are termed asymmetric or irregular warfare.

Conflicts occur mostly on the peripheries of states and insurgents are usually regarded as militarily weak and factionalised (Cilliers and Schönemann 2013, 2). This, however, is debatable, as evidenced by the attack on the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) peacekeepers in Bangui, Central African Republic (CAR). Underestimating the strength, ability and nature of Seleka rebels cost SANDF peacekeepers in blood, as 14 soldiers were killed and 26 wounded in Bangui. This rebel group incorporated 5 rebel groups known as Seleka, which means 'alliance' in the Sango language. Most rebels were child soldiers, while some were trained fighters, mostly Muslim non-state actors. It was evident that many were from neighbouring countries, since some spoke with Chadian accents and others had distinctly Arabic features (Heitman 2013, 32; Steenkamp 2013, 2). Mataboge and Underhill (2013, 4) reported that Chadian forces (former allies of the CAR) were said to have attacked the South African (SA) base. Insurgents were not the 'rag tag' rebels originally reported by intelligence, since most were in "standard uniforms with proper webbing and with flak jackets, new AK-47s and heavy weapons that included a 23 mm cannon" (Heitman 2013, 32).

The aim of this article is to focus on the rationale for SA peacekeeping initiatives, with reference to peacekeeping collaboration by the SANDF in the CAR and

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Diverse challenges are investigated with regard to these contrasting operations: in the case of the DRC there were multilateral United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU) mandates, whereas in the CAR there was a unilateral agreement between Presidents. Funding, logistics and shortcomings in asymmetric training for peace missions are also discussed.

Over the past 14 years the SANDF has participated in more than 15 peace missions with relative success. Lessons learnt from the conventional attack on peacekeepers in Bangui and on the Intervention Brigade in the DRC are articulated, and it is hoped that these will be heeded by both the SANDF and the South African government.

METHODOLOGY

The initial aim of this study was to gather primary data from peacekeeping personnel returning from the CAR and the DRC and to substantiate secondary data from media and defence reports, which were frequent at the time. After the attack in Bangui, in which 14 paratroopers were killed and 26 SANDF members wounded, the Presidency restricted information and interviews with researchers. Consequently, all access to primary information was denied and the Department of Defence (DoD) refused to reveal particulars of the agreement between the CAR and President Zuma (Styan 2013, 7). Consequently, the Defence Intelligence department was not contacted for permission to substantiate or gather information. Moreover, an attempt to contact the Media Officer in Pretoria was unsuccessful, as she was not available. Therefore, when I visited 1 Parachute Battalion in Bloemfontein during early April 2013, I made contact with the commanding officer to substantiate media reports regarding the operational experiences of returning paratroopers by means of informal, unstructured qualitative interviews. My request for open discussion was denied following the funeral of the original 13 soldiers who had been killed (another paratrooper died later of injuries), where President Jacob Zuma lashed out at the media for being insensitive and questioning the reasons for the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between himself and President François Bozizé of the CAR. This article is therefore based predominantly on secondary data received from military experts and journalists who interviewed several officers involved in the mission, some stationed at headquarters in Pretoria and some fighting in Bangui, providing a first-hand version of operational experiences. The data reflects the situation as reported by officers, based on the information to hand immediately after the events in the CAR, but does not pretend to be exhaustive (Heitman 2013, 7). Documentary information on the deployment of the Intervention Brigade in the DRC is analysed, and personal communication with a UN integration officer from Uganda, currently stationed in Sudan, is included.

Underlying this qualitative methodological technique of analysing documentary sources is a functionalist perspective, the main premise of which is that military issues of an institutional nature are viewed as organised systems of activities aimed at reaching specific goals by fulfilling manifest functions (to restore peace by means of irregular, unconventional warfare missions) in order to maintain stability in war-torn African states and contributing to the development and promotion of survival of societal systems of those countries (Ferreira 2013, 49).

RATIONALE FOR SOUTH AFRICAN PEACEKEEPING

Some of the most challenging and protracted conflicts in Africa are those still raging in the DRC and the CAR. For a long time the developed West watched these conflicts unfold, but did not intervene, since most foreign countries felt that they owed no allegiance to African states in conflict. South Africa, on the other hand, is committed to support the AU doctrine of “African solutions for African problems”. These small wars tend to recur consistently: the default option is always to revert to violence as a way to resolve disputes. The mobile, factionalised nature of armed groups, porous borders and weak and corrupt governments facilitate these conflicts, since democracy has not yet been entrenched and consequently there is no peace to keep. Belligerents exploit weak central authorities of countries such as the DRC and Sudan (Cilliers and Schünemann 2013, 3) and governance crises are caused by armed non-state groups (Ikelegbe 2010, 139). Therefore, peace operations must be seen as part of an effective political strategy aimed at conflict resolution (Williams 2013, 1).

In protracted intrastate small wars in the DRC, becoming a fighter is regarded as a better option than less promising opportunities in the weak labour market, specifically for fighters with fewer survival options in post-colonial states. Looting and armed blackmail are alternative means to fulfil immediate needs and expectations (Alusala 2011, 96). Divergence in expectations relates to Collier's (2000) predation theory of greed and grievance, which states that most belligerents thrive on grievance, perceiving themselves as being denied what they should have. This is also termed relative deprivation theory. To meet these expectations, belligerents are easily motivated by greed, lust for power or old grievances to cause conflict. Since war needs resources, belligerents display predatory behaviour to extort goods and funds from owners as ways to finance the conflict, and use grievance as motivation (Alusala 2011, 96). They turn to looting for sustainment and predation for long-term interests of resource appropriation. Resource-rich African countries such as Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, the DRC, Chad, Mali, the CAR and Sudan have been embroiled in intrastate conflicts and illegal activities. Post-colonial states with poor

governance, weak capacity and legitimacy issues are ineffective and susceptible to challenges (Okumu and Ikelegbe 2010, 21). During 2010 and 2011, 35% of all sub-Saharan conflicts were resource-related, while competition at community levels caused violence (Cilliers and Schünemann 2013, 4). Aboagye and Rupiya (2005, 249) state that more than 50% of conflicts ended by peace agreements since the 1990s again erupted in civil war. This is ascribed to the lack of governmental capacity to exert authority in post-conflict states, as well as ethnic and religious causes. Moreover, non-state actors have retained residual asymmetric capacity to deploy against weak central governments when their demands are not met in states such as the CAR and the DRC.

According to human security principles, entrenched in all domestic and foreign policies since 1994, South Africa does not stand aloof while people suffer as a result of political repression, war and natural disasters, because conflict resolution in African disputes is related to economic development and the security of a stabilised continent. It could be said that the SANDF was chosen to facilitate South Africa's foreign policy aims in Africa because of its strength and capabilities (Neethling 2012, 475). Since the SANDF is a multipurpose military, it serves in irregular asymmetric peacekeeping missions, which include non-military functions such as mediation and civilian protection, as in Burundi and the CAR, and conflict resolution to preserve regional peace and stability in countries where national security is at stake. It is on this basis that the stabilisation of Africa is central and the prime focus of South African foreign policy, which is shaped by domestic priorities to seek a better Africa in a better world, as stated in the new Defence Review (2014). South Africa's second tenure in the UN Security Council (UNSC) between 2011 and 2012 was also aimed at contributing to peace and stability in Africa (Williams 2013, 1). As early as 1999 the Department of Foreign Affairs compiled the White Paper on South African Participation in International Peace Missions. This still serves as a multilateral security approach and framework for peace missions and is an important document, since it describes South Africa's interest in Africa and its philosophy regarding conflict resolution (Neethling 2004, 1). The peace mission policy states that:

“South Africa has an obvious interest in preserving regional peace and stability in order to promote trade and development and to avoid the spill over effect of conflicts in its neighbourhood.”

While South Africa acknowledges the value of collaboration in military and civilian assistance in international peacekeeping in Africa, peacekeepers do not have straightforward tasks of monitoring agreements between states and non-state actors; instead, they are plunged into intractable situations and are expected to rebuild collapsing states and intervene between opposing parties (Cilliers 1999, 139). They

have provided peace enforcement, training and humanitarian aid and implemented security sector reforms in both the CAR and the DRC.

Peacekeeping missions need proper goals that should be approved by the UN or AU and undergo the democratic process of parliamentary oversight before a mandate is given to authorise and accept “part-responsibility for stability in Africa and elsewhere” (Cilliers and Mills 1999, 5). Parliamentary approval and public support for such involvement imply consideration of costs and risks. Risks relate to areas such as the political, military, strategic and economic spheres. The goals and objectives of the mandate must be clear to ensure a detailed operational plan with no room for ambiguity and should be realistic, as peacekeepers should remain for the duration of the mission to ensure continuity (Ferreira 2011, 105). Roles and functions to be fulfilled are determined by the specific UN or AU mandate attributed to a mission; this may be a UN Chapter V, VI or VII mandate.

Although South Africa chooses to contribute to conflict resolution, peacekeeping and reconstruction in Africa, it usually remains wary of military alliances, but strives to create economic growth in the country through bilateral and multilateral agreements (Liebenberg 2013, 10). While South Africa steers clear of alliances, this was not the case in the incident in the CAR. President Jacob Zuma chose to conclude an unprecedented unilateral “military alliance” or MoU with President François Bozizé of CAR, without an approved mandate from the AU, the UN or Parliament. This created difficulties in terms of foreign policy and future defence diplomacy. According to Nic Dawes (2013, 3) “the original deployment to prop up the unpopular regime of François Bozizé seems to have been motivated by three closely linked objectives:

- The advancement of commercial interests, including those of senior ANC figures and the party's own investment arm;
- A desire to project power into Francophone Africa;
- And the opportunity to seize from France the initiative in both the resource business and regional politics.”

These commercial and power politics are not the usual reasons for conflict resolution and for sending troops into Africa on peacekeeping missions. Therefore the main questions arising from the debate on South African peacekeeping contributions remain unanswered (Vreij 2011, 17):

- What does the South African government expect of the SANDF?
- What kind of military is appropriate in the current time?
- What roles should the SANDF play in unconventional, asymmetric peace missions in Africa when it seems as though roles are not fulfilled on ground level because of shortcomings?

THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC MISSION

The formal reason for deployment in the CAR in January 2013 was a defence cooperation agreement or MoU negotiated earlier between former Minister of Defence Lekota of President Mbeki's parliament and President Bozizé. Initially the SANDF was unaware of this MoU, and learnt of it only in December 2006, when officers of Joint Operations were informed and presented with Bozizé's list of requests for help in reducing his dependence on France, his former colonial master, which was still supporting him and protecting French citizens (Louw-Vaudran 2013, 3). Bozizé requested military assistance and training of his presidential guard, armament and business investment in the CAR. The request for armament was not fulfilled, but South Africa's involvement in mining assets was considered, as Bozizé wanted to counter French influence in controlling the CAR as a colony by taking advantage of the country's minerals. The agreement signed on 11 February 2007 between presidents Zuma and Bozizé provided for collaboration in training through capacity building of military personnel by exchange of trainees, instructors and observers to ensure stability in Africa. However, these reasons were highly debatable (Louw-Vaudran 2013, 3). The training of the CAR army for Bozizé's protection was completed by a 28-person training team in 2008, but what was offered in return is still not clear. The agreement expired in February 2012, yet the SANDF remained in a foreign country illegally. Diplomatic letters for extension were signed only in December 2012 (Makinana and Mataboge 2013, 5).

The SANDF was not keen on involvement in the CAR because it was itself underfunded and unable to support others militarily, but was pushed into action by the civilian Secretary of Defence (DefSec) in deference to the president's instructions (Heitman 2013, 8). This act relates to democratic civil–military relations or civil control of the military, but in this case leaves serious questions regarding the interaction and relationship between elected civilians as political leaders in Parliament and the SANDF. In democracies elected civilians formulate policy and the military executes it, but in the CAR only a unilateral MoU existed between two presidents without parliamentary consent or a UN/AU mandate to operate in the region. The SANDF was deployed against its will in the CAR by politicians (Esterhuysen 2013, 3). The civil–military gap is becoming wider in South Africa, as the SANDF is seen merely as an extension of the government, to be used as a tool of state to undertake peacekeeping and render military assistance. Thus, it could be said that the DefSec is not fulfilling the constitutional mandate, because government is using the SANDF despite the risk of loss of life and the absence of clear strategies and political goals, and also despite negative public opinion regarding peace missions (Esterhuysen 2013, 3).

There has been much debate regarding the undisclosed reasons for this agreement, with allegations of personal, political and business interests. According to Dodds (2013, 1), mining interests “no doubt played a role” in the South African government’s decision to participate in training the CAR army, the Forces armées centrafricaines (FACA). Only 1300 soldiers were trained, but it would seem that the mission changed continuously, as the SANDF was later deployed to defend particular economic interests near Bangui “on behalf of a corrupt, authoritarian and unpopular government” (Hartley 2013, 1) and subsequently to protect civilians in and around Bangui.

The South African government denied emphatically that the SANDF peacekeepers were protecting business interests in the CAR. However, apart from providing military training, South Africa donated \$250 000 to the CAR government in 2006 to pay international debts (Dodds 2013, 1). This fact raises further questions: why would South Africa be prepared to clear Bozizé’s debts, and why would South Africa want to operate in the CAR without any UN or AU mandate? Whatever the real reasons were for deploying the SANDF’s elite Special Forces, military personnel were committed to run the training programme and provide military assistance. In December 2012 Seleka rebels consisting of five rebel factions of different origins and with greatly improved guerrilla capabilities advanced swiftly towards the CAR. Questions were raised as to who had been training them. The first guess was Sudan, which had supported Chadian and CAR rebels in the past. However, it was afterwards ascertained that troops from the presidential guard had defected from FACA after being trained by the SANDF (Heitman 2013, 32).

By the end of December 2012 the rebels were approaching Bangui, and in requesting military assistance Bozizé invoked the 2007 MoU, stating that South Africa had not delivered armaments and that this was partly the reason why the FACA had fared so badly, as some of its members retreated even before the rebels arrived. Others fled when the first shots were fired by Seleka (Myburg 2013a, 1; Smith 2013, 4). This put the training team at risk and Zuma would have appeared to renege on a military agreement with the CAR if he had not responded positively. Withdrawing the training team and their tons of equipment and munitions posed another challenge. Consequently, a relatively small SANDF force of 200 soldiers consisting of a company of paratroopers of 1 Parachute Battalion, a detachment of 5 Special Forces Regiment, tactical intelligence and electronic intelligence teams, some engineers and signallers armed with heavy and light machine-guns, rocket launchers, 81 mm mortars, different transport vehicles to carry heavy weapons and ammunition, light transport vehicles and two Casspir armoured ambulances was prepared to protect the training and assistance teams and to withdraw them, if necessary. They deployed in the CAR on 2 January 2013, because President Zuma

elected not to sacrifice the political investment made since 2007 and to protect South African interests and the SANDF training team, gain control of weapons, munitions and equipment already in the CAR, prevent weapon seizure and protect South African citizens (Heitman 2013, 14). The SANDF base in Bangui was a former police training centre situated in the bush and surrounded by civilian homes, and unsuited for defence.

Seleka reacted by calling the small South African force ‘mercenaries,’ and demanded its immediate withdrawal before any peace settlement could be reached and a government of national unity be instituted (Myburg 2013a, 1). However, in contravention of the 2008 Libreville Comprehensive Peace Agreement, President Bozizé refused to send the SANDF home, while President Zuma supported him in this decision (Mataboge and Underhill 2013, 3). Politically the timing was bad, since South Africa had just won the chair of the AU Commission and had to protect its image by honouring agreements with African states by “presenting itself as being the natural choice for a future permanent African seat” in the UNSC (Heitman 2013, 13). These foreign policy concerns were also linked to strategic issues, since Seleka rebels, being a heterogeneous foreign group including Chadians and Sudanese, were likely to disassemble after seizing power, leaving the CAR even more unstable. The possibility was stated that Seleka rebels, controlled and trained by Sudan, could infiltrate the DRC, endanger the north-east Kivu province and enable guerrillas to attack Uganda from the DRC, which would again put SANDF troops in neighbouring north Kivu at risk (Esterhuysen 2013, 3; Mataboga and Underhill 2013, 4).

Taking these political and strategic issues into account, the small force was considered sufficient, as the idea was to bring about a negotiated settlement. It was therefore considered that 2000 FACA troops, 760 troops of the Multinational Force of Central Africa (FOMAC) and 600 French troops would be enough to deter Seleka rebels from simply seizing power in Bangui (Heitman 2013, 16). However, when the real fighting started around Bangui on 22 March 2013, these regional forces, spearheaded by Chad (FOMAC) and Bozizé’s own troops (FACA), disappeared from the scene, leaving a small, ill-equipped SANDF contingent alone to stand its ground against Seleka (Smith 2013, 4). With no aerial reconnaissance capability and limited intelligence, the SANDF commander received a report that the FOMAC and FACA forces had been overrun, with no casualties. The operational plan was to fight on two lines to deter Seleka rebels, but because of wrong intelligence leading to an underestimation of the capacities of the rebel group, no appropriate armament and support systems were in place, as the SANDF did not foresee the attack on the capital, Bangui. The aim was to deploy swiftly, maintain the ability to protect the training team and themselves and, if necessary, to fight their way out of trouble, either through Bangui airport, or possibly through the DRC (De Wet and Mataboge

2013, 5). Instead, they found themselves in the midst of a civil war in a country they had no allegiance to, on a doomed mission with no helicopters, air support or evacuation facility (Dawes 2013, 3).

Seleka rebels launched a full-scale conventional attack with rocket launchers and appropriate weaponry on SANDF soldiers. Despite requests to persuade the FACA, FOMAC and the French force to come to their assistance to hold the bridge over the Mpoko River, South Africa received no support (Dawes 2013, 3). Even firing rockets directly into the advancing rebels did not stop the attack, as more rebels, some of them children, emerged from the bush to replace those who had been hit. Mortars were fired effectively, but the rebels were still bypassing on the sides. Paratroopers were cut off while taking heavy mortar fire from Seleka rebels, and found themselves engaging a force ten times their strength. The 200 SANDF soldiers had to fight off a well-trained, well-armed and well-equipped Seleka guerrilla force of more than 3000.

By 18:00 on 23 March 2013 the base itself was under attack by 1500 rebels with mortars, heavy machine-guns and rocket-propelled grenades. On the morning of 24 March, fighting broke out again. After a while a Seleka officer jumped over the gate, shouting that they were no longer fighting. Five Seleka generals and two colonels arrived at the base, chasing away looting rebels. Another general arrived some time later, introduced himself as the officer commanding Seleka forces around the city and said that Seleka had not come to fight the SANDF. He explained that poor discipline among some troops had started the fighting, causing the SANDF to return fire. Provided the SANDF refrained from firing while Seleka rebels entered the city, the engagement would be over. Civilians in the city had by that time been issued with weapons by the CAR government, and random shooting and fighting ensued. The general admitted to having been trained by the SANDF during the early intake in 2007 before defecting to Seleka. Five hundred rebels died in the attack, and owing to the lack of medical support, hundreds more succumbed to their wounds (Heitman 2013, 6).

While initially losing 13 paratroopers and Special Force soldiers (another died afterwards) during very hard fight starting at 16:00 on 22 March 2013, the SANDF maintained cohesion throughout and was able to fall back from two separate engagement areas to its base, holding it until the rebels raised a white flag and offered a ceasefire and disengagement at 21:00 on 24 March 2013. The South African government wanted to relieve troops and deploy a stronger force to stabilise the situation, but the French commander at Bangui airport had no mandate to permit a force rotation of new South African forces (Heitman 2013, 7). This refusal was compounded by the diplomatic humiliation a few days later of the AU decision in

N'Djamena, Chad that the remaining South African troops had to be withdrawn (Dawes 2013, 3). The financial costs were estimated at R160 million.

THE AFTERMATH AND RECONSIDERATION

This conventional attack on the SANDF left many unanswered questions. The discussion in this article is certainly not exhaustive, but one thing is certain: this was “an unprecedented domestic and international disaster for Pres Zuma and his administration and far from asserting its strength on French-speaking turf” (Dawes 2013, 3). Rebel leader Michel Djotodia made it clear on arrival in Bangui that the agreements reached with Bozizé, who fled to Cameroon, would be re-examined, as there was no formal mandate for military involvement, let alone the defence of Bangui. The SANDF was overcommitted and underfunded and could not provide Bozizé with armament following two decades of budgetary cuts and involvement in two more missions in western Darfur, Sudan and the DRC, as well as border control in South Africa, while the Air Force did not have the strategic airlift capacity to deploy troops and armament.

The main problem was that SANDF troops were deployed in terms of an MoU on the basis of a government-to-government pact, without formal mandates from the UN or the AU and without parliamentary oversight and public support, which are required in a democracy, as civilian oversight is acknowledged in civil–military relations. Since South Africa was acting unilaterally, it had no real ability to call for support in a conventional attack. The only option left was to admit that troops should not have been deployed in the first place. As early as January 2013, when the Bozizé government and Seleka rebels decided to form a government of national unity in Bangui, Seleka had demanded that the SANDF be removed, but the forces remained because presidents Zuma and Bozizé refused to let them withdraw. The troops received conflicting and confusing reports from Pretoria: first they were told that their mission was to train CAR soldiers, then they were instructed to protect South African property and, lastly, to protect civilians in and around Bangui (Myburgh 2013b, 1).

Democratic Alliance defence spokesman, David Maynier, called for a parliamentary investigation of President Zuma’s decision regarding the deployment of the SANDF to ascertain whether it had been authorised against the advice of Defence Minister Mapisa-Nqakula and the military command, who reportedly recommended in January 2013 that the training team in the CAR be withdrawn. Why the SANDF was deployed in the middle of a civil war, with little military support, merited investigation, particularly since no air support or transport aircraft to evacuate soldiers was available (Hartley 2013, 1).

Hartley (2013, 1) raised questions about the level of training for such missions and support offered to the 200 soldiers deployed in Bangui. Referring to the size and nature of the battle, Heitman (in Hartley 2013) commented that competence does not seem to have been the issue: “with 200 soldiers facing 3,000 rebels and inflicting some 500 casualties resulting in them raising a white flag shows how good our special forces are, but it raises the question of why they were still a light force when they should have had armoured personnel carriers and other heavier equipment.” Military experts have long been warning that the SANDF cannot properly undertake peace operations without appropriate airlift capacity, as transport aircraft had to be chartered at huge costs. Soldiers can only do their best with what they have, which in this case was woefully inadequate for the role South Africa wished to play as a regional peacekeeping force.

Louw-Vaudran (2013, 3) cautions that it is risky to choose sides in African affairs, as alliances change overnight. South African peacekeepers reported that FACA soldiers whom they had trained and protected changed sides and, still in their uniforms, shot at them with RPG-7s. The Zuma administration appears never to have considered the possibility and political implications of a collapse of the tenuous truce between Bozizé, his former French protectors and the Chadians, now supporting the mostly Muslim Seleka rebels in a predominantly Christian country.

However, “[a]t home, sadness and incomprehension, followed by growing outrage, met the arrival of body bags at Air Force Base Waterkloof” (Dawes 2013, 3). Serious questions began to be asked concerning future SANDF deployments in African peace missions. In the words of Hartley (2013, 1), “We have a government that continually underfunds and that gets people killed. There is blood on the hands of the Treasury and the Cabinet”. The outcome might have been vastly different if government had intervened and adjusted the defence budget to the extent that soldiers were able to perform their duties properly.

NEW COLLABORATION IN THE DRC

In terms of the 1998 Defence Review and the new Defence Review (South Africa 2014), SANDF peacekeepers are to assist in African countries facing insecurities and complex emergencies. Troops serving in the DRC under the UN Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) were transferred to the UN Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) by the end of August 2013. This new collaboration in the multilateral regional force to conduct peace enforcement changed the dynamics in the DRC conflict. South African peacekeepers formed part of the FIB, a component of MONUSCO, which is a 3000-strong contingent including 1345 peacekeepers from South Africa, Tanzania and Malawi authorised

by an unprecedented offensive UN mandate on 28 March 2013. “Partnership peacekeeping” involves collaboration between various multilateral actors and has become increasingly common (Williams 2013, 1). For the first time in UN history of more than 65 years of UN peace missions, an offensive mandate to conduct targeted offensive operations was granted to allow “neutralisation of armed groups in the east of the DRC” (Martin 2013b, 2), specifying the elimination of an entrenched armed movement, the mostly ethnic Tutsi rebel group M23.

The M23 rebels were named after the 23 March 2009 peace agreement signed after four years of conflict in eastern DRC between the government of DRC and the rebel militia, the National Congress for the Defence of the People (Robles 2014, 2). Rebels defected in 2012 because the government had failed to honour this agreement, which included integrating them into the regular DRC army, the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC). After seizing Goma in November 2012, the rebels further demanded that DRC President Joseph Kabila hold national talks, release political prisoners and disband the electoral commission. Since MONUSCO failed to protect civilians from the M23 rebels, who were committing human rights abuses against internally displaced women and children, the UNSC approved an offensive force that included tanks, helicopters and the use of drones (Robles 2014, 3), the latter being intended to keep watch over displaced people on the run from rebels and monitor the movements of the armed groups.

Bertrand Bisimwa, political leader of the M23 rebels, threatened retaliation and warned that peacekeepers of the FIB would endure the same fate as the SANDF in the CAR (Pelser 2013, 1). Once again, allegations were made that President Zuma was deploying peacekeepers in the DRC because of family business interests and the oil interests of his nephew, Khulubuse, near Lake Albert (Visram 2013, 1; Pelser 2013, 1). The FIB was told not to underestimate the power and resilience of M23 as Sultani Makenga, their commanding officer, had vast experience in overthrowing governments (Rwanda 1994 and Zaire 1996). They had dangerous weapons such as rocket launchers and a 37 mm cannon stolen from the FARDC (Pelser 2013, 1).

South African infantry troops and support elements from Special Forces, paratroopers and engineers were flown to Goma in Kivu province in north-eastern DRC at the end of August 2013. This movement was regarded as a normal rotation of the UN MONUSCO mission, but the same 1345 troops were deployed in the FIB. Tons of weaponry, including helicopters, was flown in chartered Russian cargo planes to Entebbe, Uganda. The FIB has assisted the FARDC since becoming operational.

Jungle terrain in the DRC would require appropriate training, and some SANDF officers were sent to Brazil to undergo jungle warfare training ahead of their deployment to the DRC (Martin 2013b, 1). The fact that the M23 rebels knew

the terrain and politics of the region better posed problems, and heightened the possibility of the loss of life among South African peacekeepers. The DefSec, Dr Sam Gulube, assessed troop requirements and was told “to use what he had” in terms of resources and equipment needed for the contingent from a Special Defence Account for capitalisation expenses for peacekeeping. The 3000-strong FIB, consisting of three infantry battalions, one artillery and one reconnaissance company and Special Forces, was under the command of Brigadier James Mwakibolwa of Tanzania. It was fully prepared to fulfil its offensive operations mandate in early September 2013. The FIB, backed by the FARDC, strengthened its positions around Goma and launched an assault with attack helicopters, forcing M23 rebels away from Goma; they laid down their arms and retreated into Uganda. In consequence, they returned to peace talks with the DRC government. The M23 delegation leader, Rene Abandi, awaited a government delegation of President Kabila, a former rebel himself, from Kinshasa in the Ugandan capital, Kampala, to resume peace talks according to an ultimatum set by regional leaders to broker peace in the fighting in the resource-rich eastern DRC. The negotiations in Kampala were challenging, since Kabila was determined to disband M23 and have it become a formal political party, but the M23 political leader, Bertrand Bisimwa, responded that if they were forced to disband, they would have no interest in being reintegrated into the FARDC. “Nobody is interested in anything else”; “M23 will not be a political party. Each one will take care of his cabbages and carrots, because we are herders, farmers and merchants” (News24, 2013a).

By 18 September 2013, Bisimwa stated that M23 rebels were ready to disarm, but on two conditions: they would disband only if another rebel group consisting of ethnic Rwandan Hutu fighters, the democratic Force for Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), was disarmed and if Congolese refugees returned home from neighbouring countries. In the past Rwanda had justified military intervention in the DRC to protect itself from the FDLR, some of whose core members took part in the 1994 Rwandan genocide (News24 2013b). There were reports that Rwanda was sympathetic to M23 and was involving itself in the conflict by supplying troops, weapons and equipment. This was confirmed during personal communication with a UN integration officer, Alfred Mutiti from Uganda, in August 2013 in Pretoria. Moreover, vehicles and heavy equipment appeared to have been flown from South Africa via Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. In addition to strong suspicions of support to M23, they now had excellent intelligence on armament for the SANDF. Nonetheless, attempts were made to safeguard the Rwandese border; a convoy of vehicles, tanks and even cannons were mobilised to protect the border in early September 2013 (*Rapport* 2013, 7) to protect civilians from recurrent attacks by rebel groups.

Within a few months of their deployment the FIB and FARDC managed to defeat the M23 rebels and to make striking gains, having their “eyes set on the Force for Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and Mai Mai rebel groups” remaining in the region (Robles 2014, 2). Political opponents of President Kabila still thought that the previous elections had been biased (News24 2013b), but in most cases claims from rebel groups did not receive much attention in peace talks, which resulted in recurring violence. Since the UN has established that the FIB “provides a specific remedy for a unique case”, it has focussed upon the remaining rebel groups (Robles 2014, 2). The success of the FIB was seen as active peacemaking and led to offensive interventions being regarded as best practice. Martin Kobler, head of MONUSCO, stated that precision missions by South African Air Force Rooivalk combat support helicopters in March 2014 were part of the “overall objective to end recurrent attacks against civilians by rebel groups” (Reuters 2014, 1). Since atrocities against women and children continue to be committed by rebel factions in the eastern jungles of the DRC, peace remains distant (Robles 2014, 4).

DIVERSE CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS TO PEACEKEEPING

The expectations of international communities since 1999 that South Africa, regarded as the African economic powerhouse, would play a leading role in the continent’s peace missions, are misguided because “South Africa is not deploying the amounts of troops and equipment expected of them,” according to Jakkie Cilliers (in IRIN 2012, 1). There is concern about lack of resources to fulfil all expectations regarding a range of peacekeeping missions. The reasons are an overstretched DoD, lack of funding, the quality of training for unconventional missions and organisational transformation that hampers discipline, as well as operational and logistic capacity.

LACK OF RESOURCES, THE SHRINKING DEFENCE BUDGET, WRONG EQUIPMENT AND TRAINING

While peacekeepers are relatively well prepared for their operational tasks, they often lack the necessary equipment, support and intelligence to conduct peace operations. In the CAR troops experienced insufficient and inadequate ammunition, military support, communications, vehicles and airlift capacity. Since the SANDF budget has not been properly sustained over the past two decades and training for peacekeeping is mission-specific, the situation in 2014 raises doubt as to whether the SANDF is capable of fulfilling its operational role in assisting with peace

missions. Developments in the past decade have shown the SANDF to be incapable of projecting a positive defence image internationally and in particular on the African continent, where its services are needed. The media reported that "South Africa's military is seen as punching below its weight in peacekeeping operations in Africa" (IRIN 2012, 3). Nevertheless, at a media briefing in September 2011, Defence Minister Lindiwe Sisulu reported that 2304 military personnel were on peace-support operations in the CAR, Darfur in Sudan and the DRC.

According to Martin (2013a:1-2), R40.658 billion was budgeted for defence in 2013/14 and spent between April and September 2013. In October 2013 the mid-term budget allocated an additional R414 million to defence for the 2013/14 fiscal year. According to the Treasury, the DoD increased expenditure by R2.335 billion during 2013/14 owing to salary increases, additional humanitarian external deployments and claims against the DoD. The deployment to the UN FIB cost another R150 million, "classified under unseen and unavoidable expenditure" (Martin 2013a, 1-2).

Although South Africa does not face any conventional armed threats to its territorial integrity in the near future, this does not negate the fact that continuous upgrading of equipment, armament and skills is necessary. Neglect of defence capabilities could affect border security and trade, and constrain peacekeeping and diplomatic missions. The 2014 Defence Review cautions that: "Even with an immediate intervention, it could take at least five years to arrest the decline and another five years to develop a limited and sustainable defence capability" (South Africa 2014).

According to Cilliers (in IRIN 2012, 2), the 1998 Defence Review led South Africa to enter into a multi-billion dollar (R30 billion) arms deal, called the Strategic Defence Package, in 1999, resulting in the purchase of a range of expensive, sophisticated weaponry from European suppliers. This comprised 28 Gripen fighters and 24 Hawk training jets, 25 light utility helicopters, 3 submarines and 4 corvettes (Botha 2003, 5). These purchases were afterwards considered totally "inappropriate" for peacekeeping duties. In consequence, an additional contract was signed in September 2005 for 8 Airbus military A400m transport aircraft at a cost of about US\$1 billion to be used by the SANDF for airlifting heavy armament and transporting peacekeeping troops. The order was cancelled in 2009, financial constraints and associated cost increases being cited as reason (IRIN 2012, 5). On 19 December 2011 South Africa was reimbursed the US\$407 million down-payment by the European aircraft manufacturer. These transport aircraft had been expected to enter service in 2013, and would have assisted greatly in the Bangui attack when additional troops, as well as logistic and medical supplies, were desperately needed. The general consensus is that peacekeeping cannot be undertaken without

airlift capacities and that wrong equipment bought in the armament deal has been detrimental to the SANDF (IRIN 2012, 5). The SANDF currently relies on four aging operational Lockheed C-130 Hercules military transporters, while another five are not in service. The 1999 arms deal, the cost of which is calculated to have escalated to R70 billion (US\$8.5 billion) by 2011, left the country with military hardware that was both “expensive to maintain and which will probably never be used ... This is the long-term tragedy of the arms deal [in that it constrains South Africa’s peacekeeping abilities]” (Cilliers in IRIN 2012, 2). It is clear that the SANDF is struggling to make ends meet, since budgets are cut every year. Budget constraints result in the inefficiency of military equipment, and only a small proportion of the Olifant tanks and Rooikat armoured cars are operational, while all the SANDF Augusta helicopters are grounded because of lack of funding (Gibson 2013, 1).

Peacekeeping troops usually have to do the best they can with what facilities they have and there is generally a mismatch between the mission and the forces assigned. When forces are too small to carry out a specific job properly, as in the CAR, the conflict recurs some time later. South Africa’s contribution to humanitarian missions since 1999 has had physical limitations, such as transport and logistical problems, as the SANDF is not geared for long logistic supply lines into African countries. When troops were deployed in the CAR, no kitchen was ever installed for them (Myburgh 2013a:1), and peacekeepers had to live on ration packs; the absence of any provision for feeding and supporting peacekeepers properly constitutes evidence of disorganisation and incompetence.

In addition to these operational limitations, dealing with civilian populations and local political authorities in Africa poses additional challenges. Lack of knowledge of different cultures, human relations and inadequate negotiation skills often exacerbate tensions and affect mission success, because of variations in the education and training of peacekeepers. Measuring up to the SANDF slogan of “train hard and fight easy” can be difficult. Conventional warfare training is vastly different from unconventional, asymmetric warfare situations in the operational area. Conventional training is “what to do when under fire, but not how to negotiate, deal with accidents or how to handle opposing forces when weapons were drawn, but not fired” (Heinecken and Ferreira 2012, 31). This is further reference to the need for training in negotiation skills, people skills and cultural awareness. There are fewer cultural barriers in the DRC, as some South Africans speak Kiswahili, which makes communication easier and enhances their credibility with the local population.

Additional constraints and challenges of South African peacekeeping are “high HIV/AIDS infection rates, aging soldiers, a top-heavy officer class and a serious

skills shortage”, while “more than half the soldiers were medically unfit, with many regarded as too old for active service” (IRIN 2012, 4).

LESSONS LEARNT

The nature of African peacekeeping missions is clearly changing, since the missions in the CAR and DRC differed greatly from former missions in the DRC, Burundi and Sudan. The usual processes for authorising mandates were not followed in the CAR, reflecting badly on the DefSec, who did not fulfil his constitutional obligation to ensure sound civil–military relations through civil control of the military. An important qualitative and political-security difference and crux of the issue was an unprecedented unilateral “military alliance” between states with no consenting mandate from the AU/UN or South African parliament, while in contrast, the DRC, UN and FIB had a multilateral offensive mandate to neutralise armed groups in eastern DRC. Full-scale conventional war was waged in both the CAR and the DRC, which was unprecedented in African peace missions.

It is to be hoped that the South African government has now learnt that its defence capabilities are not up to the standard of a major power force, and that delusions of grandeur do not serve ill-equipped peacekeeping missions. Political indecision by government relating to what is expected of the SANDF is evident, in that defence budgets are cut annually while politicians and the treasury still expect miracles from the SANDF, whose roles have expanded to include peacekeeping in Africa, but which is not receiving the financial support it requires for this. Where the political goals are clear, the SANDF should be financed accordingly, taking into account budgets and required levels of readiness before embarking on peace missions. Jungle training has been introduced, as future operations will be more conventional to counter armed attacks by rebel forces.

It is clear that yet further lessons remain to be learnt in order to sustain and maintain a credible SANDF. Issues such as compulsory mandates, decisions on the type of conflict to be counteracted, negotiation skills and cultural awareness, intelligence, reconnaissance, coordination, mobility, force composition, air support and air transport are crucial when peacekeepers are sent into Africa to defend countries and people to whom they owe little allegiance. What follows is a comparison of the missions in CAR and DRC on the basis of a number of elements.

Mandates: AU, UN and parliamentary authorisation is necessary in order for any troop-contributing country to collaborate in both conventional and irregular, unconventional peace missions, because both international and domestic consent are crucial. Sound civil–military relations secure mandates. This requirement was not adhered to in the CAR. A unilateral decision was taken by the presidency to send

troops to participate in an unclear, doomed mission. In the DRC, the UN FIB was fully authorised and mandated to collaborate with several other countries.

Type of conflict fought by the SANDF: In democracies the decision to deploy the defence force, as an instrument of state, in war-torn countries to conduct peace missions against non-state actors is a political one. Civil–military relations between politicians and generals are delicate, as decisions are made regarding issues involving the legitimacy of deploying the SANDF. The SANDF appears to have been deployed against its will in the CAR and government therefore has to accept responsibility for the deployment and death of its soldiers. In contrast to this mission, the DRC mission had a multilateral UN offensive mandate to neutralise Seleka rebels in eastern DRC.

Negotiation skills and cultural awareness: Negotiation skills and knowledge of the culture of rebel groups could facilitate better understanding of opponents. Training in cultural awareness could have eliminated misunderstandings in emergencies in both the CAR and DRC.

Intelligence: This proved to be a complete failure in the CAR, as peacekeepers received wrong intelligence and underestimated well-organised, armed Seleka rebels among whom were numerous foreign troops from Chad and Sudan, properly trained by the Sudanese and, ironically, also by the SANDF trainers in Bangui. In the DRC the UN FIB used drones to facilitate intelligence gathering, but these were withdrawn when the M23 forces were successfully overthrown.

Reconnaissance: The SANDF had no aerial reconnaissance means in the CAR. As a source of information unmanned drones or aerial vehicle systems would have been invaluable to the force commander, apart from what the troops could establish from the local population and what FOMAC and FACA were prepared to divulge, since they turned against President Bozizé and thus effectively also against the SANDF when they openly attacked them.

Coordination: There was no combined strategy or combined headquarters coordinating the various forces in the CAR against the rebel attack. In contrast, the DRC mission was headed by a Tanzanian general who coordinated peacekeepers from South Africa, Malawi and Tanzania under a proper UN offensive mandate against M23 rebels.

Mobility: The deployed SANDF force did not have enough vehicles to put up an effective fight against the Seleka rebels. The paratroopers had only seven light eight-wheeled vehicles intended to move heavy mortars, machine-guns and ammunition and to evacuate casualties. There were no armoured vehicles, except for two Casspir ambulances. More mobility would have facilitated the commander's task. In contrast, the UN mission in the DRC was equipped with sufficient vehicles and armament to sustain the mission against M23 rebels.

Force composition: The 200-troop strong force was totally inadequate to face between 3000 and 7000 well-armed rebels in the CAR. No air-transportable combat vehicles or artillery was available for support (Heitman 2013, 36). The South African Air Force does not have the transport aircraft to move heavy weaponry, and is able to transport only a small number of light vehicles by air. South Africa does not have the ability to support long logistic supply lines. In contrast, the multilateral UN FIB in the DRC was fully equipped with the necessary armament and air support from different countries.

Air support: A few attack helicopters could have made a crucial difference in the CAR and lives could have been saved. However, no South African transport aircraft is available to accommodate helicopters without major disassembly, which would take time to be operational. Although South Africa has outstanding fighters in the Gripen and Hawk aircraft, it does not have tanker aircraft to support them over distances of 3500 kilometres to the CAR and DRC (Heitman 2013, 37). In contrast, the FIB had Rooivalk attack helicopters, flown to Uganda by chartered Russian carriers, which facilitated the successful attack in Goma, eastern DRC.

Air transport: The SANDF does not have a strategic airlift capacity to fly reinforcements quickly into conflict areas, such as the CAR, to deploy combat vehicles and fighter aircraft. The order for eight Boeing A400 transport aircraft was cancelled, owing to lack of funding. The new multilateral FIB in eastern DRC had the advantage of landing in Entebbe, Uganda to facilitate logistic support.

The South African government must acknowledge that sending troops into missions without relevant mandates and armament is irresponsible. According to Williams (2013, 1), maintaining legitimacy among international and local stakeholders is a crucial element of success. Politicians should bear the blame for not understanding the necessity of equipping peacekeepers, and for cutting defence budgets unnecessarily in consequence.

According to Heitman (2013, 37), the authorities should derive several lessons from this inability to deploy peacekeepers into Africa effectively. However, the “major political lesson to be learned from the events in the CAR quite independently of the military lessons” is that: “all governments employ their armed forces to further and protect their country’s political and economic interests. That has been so since the days of kings and has not somehow magically changed with the spread of democratic governments.” Where unilateral military assistance agreements are concerned, there is a fine line between national interests and individual interests of ruling party members. The purpose of the CAR agreement and deployment remains debatable and more transparency is required; by contrast, the purpose of the FIB in the DRC was to fight an entrenched armed movement, the rebel group M23. The UN

offensive mandate was authorised to conduct targeted offensive operations to allow “neutralisation of armed groups in the east of the DRC” (Martin 2013b, 2).

CONCLUSION

It is important for government, and specifically President Zuma, to understand that they cannot unilaterally decide to deploy peacekeepers into Africa to die in unforeseen conventional fighting because of unclear objectives and inadequate armament support and without at least a parliamentary mandate based on broad public approval and support. In the words of Dawes (2013, 3): “when you go to war in a democracy, you have to take the people with you. We were dimly aware of the CAR deployment to begin with, and we certainly were not warned of the risks that precipitated the sending of crack parabats and Special Forces operators in January.” This underlines the breach or gap in civil–military relations, since the public or civilian partners were not permitted to give input on military matters as stated by the Defence Act of 2002 and the functions of the Secretary of Defence. Effective civil-military relations in South Africa are determined by the extent to which political, military and civilian partners find agreement and accommodate one another in reaching consensus on the values and objectives of the SANDF.

The South African government should decide on what is expected of the SANDF, because if the political and military objectives are credible and understood, the SANDF will not be deployed in unauthorised peace missions for unilateral economic gain in African countries. It would fulfil roles and carry out peacekeeping tasks according to a mandated mission and be financed accordingly. Military readiness for specific operations should be determined on political and strategic levels before troops are deployed, while budgets and the required readiness must be ensured before deployment.

Since the military and political objectives in the CAR were not credible or understood, South Africa’s peacekeeping operations are synonymous with controversy, as was the case when the unilateral deployment in the CAR became public knowledge following the deaths of 14 SANDF soldiers. Peacekeepers are often charged with more responsibilities than they are mandated to assume. So, for instance, the SANDF had to protect themselves not only from armed attacks by rebel groups such as Seleka, but also from regional government forces (FOMAC and FACA), whom they had trained and trusted, but who turned against them. In contrast, the DRC Intervention Brigade, operating under the authority of a multilateral UN offensive mandate, had a central command structure and clear operational plan to neutralise M23 rebels in eastern DRC, with appropriate weaponry and attack helicopters for a successful intervention.

The changing nature of peace missions has influenced operational experiences and relevant training of peacekeepers, which did not prepare them for the reality on the ground. Future training will include jungle warfare, while suitable and appropriate equipment for specific missions and financial constraints will have to be dealt with successfully. Although the SANDF is operationally overstretched because of understaffing, logistics support and airlift capacity are crucial, as are disciplinary issues that ultimately relate to management and leadership. Only time will tell what the outcome of future SANDF participation in peacekeeping in Africa will be, since democracy, human security and human rights are not always part of the thinking of African governments. Support must be given to the basic principles of constitutional government, and crudely majoritarian governance must be rejected.

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