

Using Force to Promote Peace

By Comfort Ero¹

Introduction

In the last two years, there has been a surge of military interventions in Africa including the deployment of new peace operations. It is part of a growing trend in the militarisation of civilian protection and even a shift from peacekeeping towards peace enforcement. Some African states and the African Union (AU) have pushed for more muscular peace operations, for at least three reasons: to fight Islamist insurgencies and prevent terrorism; to neutralise their political enemies; and to address growing frustration that traditional United Nations (UN) peace operations, even under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, have proven incapable of resolving African crises. Another important undercurrent is the desire, especially within the AU, to take the lead in responding to African crises. The international community (particularly the West) reluctant to deploy troops in Africa, has supported and even financed this more robust approach, especially when it has helped address its own security concerns. In other cases, Western countries have intervened directly in some crises, with or without the backing of African states, when they considered their national security to be directly threatened.

Whatever the ultimate objective, this willingness to use force raises fundamental questions about its utility and how to appropriately balance it with the more important goals of mediating and building sustainable peace. Tensions between the use of force and mediation have long existed, but can the use or threat of force work as a tool to promote peace or does it always act as an impediment to it? Should we acknowledge that, in some cases, the threat or even use of force is needed to stabilise the situation and create space for dialogue, to encourage factions to respect the provisions of a peace deal, or to protect civilians? What are the dangers associated with using, or threatening to use, force? Is enough done at the political level to complement or shore up military interventions? Do such interventions lay the foundations for sustainable political solutions or are they no more than containment strategies? Tied to these questions is the challenge of resolving conflicts in such a way that external actors, particularly the UN and AU, do not become substitutes for the security services of weak governments, especially those with authoritarian tendencies.

This paper addresses these issues, drawing on several specific cases: the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, Somalia and the Central African Republic (CAR).²

1. Democratic Republic of Congo: An intervention brigade to protect a political process

For over 15 years, the DRC has hosted one of the UN's longest, and most expensive, peacekeeping missions. Despite some positive results, the country continues to limp from one crisis to another, particularly in the east.

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2 This paper has benefited from extensive research conducted by my colleagues and discussions I have had in my capacity as Africa Program Director at the International (ICG). It does not cite those Crisis Group interviews, but has drawn on numerous conversations with a cross section of national, regional and international actors involved in the cases discussed here.

The latest crisis started in late 2012 with the emergence of a new rebellion called “March 23” (M23). Failure to implement the 23 March 2009 peace deal between the Government and the rebels as well as heightening ethnic tensions and Rwanda’s continued interference have led to yet another insurrection in eastern Congo. This crisis created the risk of regional conflict and it has raised questions about the utility of long term peacekeeping, the efficacy of international efforts to manage conflict, and the equivocal role of a government that was weakened by the flawed 2011 Presidential elections but has remained central to resolving the crisis.

Using force to resolve crises in the DRC is not a new idea. In 2003, the Security Council authorised the French-led European Union force (Operation Artemis) to stabilise the Ituri region following a breakdown in security. Controversially, in December 2008, the UN also extended the mandate of its mission, MONUSCO, to support the Congolese army (FARDC) in its fight against eastern militias.

However, a real doctrinal rupture in peacekeeping occurred in late 2012. Failure to prevent the seizure of Goma by MONUSCO (despite a strong civilian protection mandate) and an incompetent and abusive FARDC prompted several African states (including the Congolese Government) and regional organisations to push for the deployment of a so-called Neutral Intervention Force (NIF). It was a telling request that reflected frustration with the UN’s repeated failure to maintain peace in the east as well as impatience with President Kabila’s poor governance and Rwanda’s continued interference.

A complicated round of negotiations culminated in the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework signed in February 2013 in Addis Ababa by the Congolese Government, regional states and organisations, as well as the AU, UN and other international partners. This was signed in Addis Ababa by the Congolese Government, regional states and organisations, as well as the AU, UN and other international partners.³ The agreement defines a “new deal” between the UN and the DRC in which a military unit within MONUSCO – the international intervention brigade – would pursue “targeted offensive operations” against eastern militias. At the same time, the Government would reform its army (one of its failed obligations under the 2009 deal) and implement governance reforms. The agreement also recognises that the crisis in eastern Congo was both a national and a regional one which required the region to work together to promote development and end impunity.

The use of the international brigade – including troops from Tanzania, South Africa and Malawi – stretches UN peacekeeping doctrine but may also be a realistic response to conventional peacekeeping failures, exemplified by the fall of Goma. Time will tell whether it can bring peace and provide the necessary military pressure to enable proper implementation of the February agreement. Underlying it are the laudable goals of protecting civilians and tackling the informal militias.

But it creates its own problems, particularly the use of UN and regional troops as surrogates for the Government’s failed security apparatus. There are clearly dangers involved in drawing UN peacekeeping missions into aggressive military operations that risk civilian casualties. Further, the use of force against armed groups in the Kivu region has also repeatedly failed and cannot be a long term response to local disputes fuelled by economic rivalries, land disputes and social grievances.

Military action may also detract from the vital, but more arduous, tasks of reconciling communities, encouraging political leaders to reform, improving governance, and building strong and inclusive institutions. Moreover, ruling elites as well as regional and major powers will be tempted to exploit more robust mandates for peacekeepers to try and wipe out groups they see as spoilers, criminals or terrorists but which, in some cases, represent communities with legitimate grievances. Military action, even where needed, can only be one part of a much broader, and more nuanced, conflict resolution strategy that is tailored to local conditions. Unless military offensives against militias are accompanied by a campaign to address the conditions in which they flourish, the Kivus, like other conflict zones on the continent, will remain unstable and UN troops will be fighting the symptoms, rather than the causes, of violence.

3 Negotiation efforts were also being pursued between the Congolese Government and the M23 in Kampala.

The role of the new UN Special Envoy to the Great Lakes is part of a new, broader political strategy and Mary Robinson sees the brigade as playing a deterrent role in support of her political work. Growing political pressure on Rwanda, including criticism by the UN Secretary-General about continued interference in eastern Congo, has put Kigali in a defensive mode. The brigade could change the options for political settlement, but the battlefield outcome remains uncertain despite the August offensive against the M23. There are also concerns that Kinshasa's recent advances could temper its willingness to make concessions.

2. Mali: Balancing military intervention with political dialogue

Recent conflict in Mali has posed an dilemma: how to resolve a crisis that is not just about the failure of domestic governance, but also involves the twin threats of transnational terrorism and organised crime.

For over two decades, Mali was ostensibly a model of Sub-Saharan democratic progress. The March 2012 military coup deposed President Touré but, following the threat of military action from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the junta ceded power to a civilian authority. The coup was triggered by the army's abandonment of the north of the country in the face of a new Touareg rebellion led by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). The MNLA was driven by historical grievances and bolstered by an influx of well-armed fighters from post-Qadhafi Libya. The MNLA declared independence in April but was rapidly outflanked by its erstwhile Islamist allies led by Ansar Dine, an armed group with links to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and its splinter groups including the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO).

There appeared to be little appetite for international military action and the insistence on political dialogue yielded only limited progress, with not all of Bamako's political class wanting to negotiate with the rebels. A special meeting on the Sahel during the September 2012 UN General Assembly agreed that military action would likely be required.

The regional and international response was made more difficult by the complexity of Mali's neighbourhood. There was division, and a lack of clarity, among ECOWAS Member States over its mediation (led by President Compaoré of Burkina Faso) and within West African political and security circles on the strategy which would best protect their countries from destabilization. Tensions emerged between Mali's military and political authorities, especially over ECOWAS' proposed deployment of 3,300 troops to restore stability and help the government recapture the north.⁴ Bamako had differences with Algeria, its powerful northern neighbour, over the restoration of security in their shared border regions.

There were distinct policy options available. Firm support for military action against the terrorist groups in Mali did not sit easily with arguments for a negotiated solution. The former held no guarantee of victory, the latter might contain the violence but legitimise terrorist and criminal activities in the Sahel. Other UN member states were divided over military intervention; the U.S., chastened by its experience in Afghanistan and Iraq, urged caution about intervening in another Muslim state, while France and some of Mali's neighbours leaned toward the use of force.

On 20 December 2012, Security Council Resolution 2085 authorised the deployment of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) but, in a sign of scepticism about the appropriateness of an expensive peacekeeping mission in the midst of a significant terror threat, no timetable was set for recapturing the north. This would only take place after the training of AFISMA and Malian forces and the submission of a progress report to the Security Council. The uncertain approach seemed to question both the utility of force alone and the possibility of securing a political solution with powerful Islamist groups.

4 The deployment of ECOWAS troops was a major point of contention between ECOWAS and the Malian army, which did not want to see its monopoly on force diminished by the presence of regional troops. Similarly, interim President Traoré had previously expressed opposition to the presence of foreign troops in the capital.

A sudden march southward towards Bamako by Islamist fighters in January 2013 prompted a rapid French military intervention. With the support of Chadian troops, the Islamists were ousted from major northern towns. Paris quickly declared its intention to end its military campaign and, as an exit strategy, pushed for the establishment of a peace operation led by the UN, along with much more rapid timelines than those anticipated for AFISMA.

The French intervention led to a more dynamic international response. It forced the region to accelerate AFISMA's deployment and the Security Council to draft a framework for a UN mission. But the prospect of an international operation in Mali raised questions about peacekeeping in a militarised, unstable environment where terrorist groups had not been fully neutralised and where there was no peace process, nor effective central government.

Significant doubts were raised in the lead-up to a Security Council decision on the mandate of the mission including whether it could create peace; support the national dialogue and electoral process; restore territorial integrity; stabilise liberated areas; fight terrorist groups; and contain transnational organised crime. Major differences emerged between the UN departments for peacekeeping and political affairs, with the latter particularly concerned about the absence of political strategies in peace operations. However, the debate at the UN Secretariat should never have been posited as “either/or”; rather, it should have been clear at the outset that any offensive action should be complemented by a political process.

In the end, there was clear consensus among Security Council members that there would be no UN combat operation in Mali or mission similar to the “exceptional” brigade in the DRC. On 25 April 2013, Resolution 2001 recognised that the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) would need a robust stabilisation mandate, carefully balanced with a strong political component focusing on the reconstruction of Mali's institutions; assisting with national dialogue and reconciliation; promoting and protecting human rights; as well as support for national and international justice. The framework for international action seemed right: the roots of Mali's problems lie less in terrorism or Tuareg demands than in years of exclusionary and dysfunctional governance.

Another impact of the French intervention was the change in the internal balance of forces that enabled both a political process and the organisation of the Presidential election.⁵ Following surprisingly peaceful polls in July and a run-off in August, the focus must now be on politics, rather than counter-terrorism or military strategy, including the re-establishment of state authority in the north and inclusive dialogue with all Malians.

According to the June 2013 Ouagadougou agreement, inclusive peace negotiations are scheduled 60 days after the new President appoints his government. However, stabilising Mali may well prove tricky; the situation remains volatile, particularly in the north. In late September, Arab and Touareg armed groups suspended, and later reactivated, their participation in the agreement. In October, two Chadian peacekeepers and one child were killed in a suicide bomb in the northern Kidal region. These events clearly indicate the tough struggle ahead, especially in the north where seasoned Islamist fighters continue hiding along the border.

The full deployment of the new UN mission, and political backing for it, will be critical to stability – a poorly equipped mission will be no match for the agile Islamist forces. The building up of MINUSMA, however, should not overshadow the political process, lest UN troops end up fighting on behalf of an incapable and unreformed government that may become unpopular in the north and over which the international community may have little leverage.

5 The French intervention had a similar effect to the UK intervention against rebel forces in Sierra Leone in 2000, including in strengthening and improving the leverage of the UN mission.

3. Somalia: Fighting terrorism through internationally-backed AU peace enforcement

Military intervention – in essence, counter-terrorism – has sat uncomfortably alongside mediation efforts in Somalia. In fact, until recently, there has been less of the latter and more of the former.

It is possible Somalia is currently facing its best prospect for peace and stability. Since late 2011, developments including an increasingly muscular AU force (AMISOM) working with various clan militias and assertive regional actors (particularly Ethiopia and Kenya) all backed by renewed international military support, have provided a significant opportunity to transform the dynamics on the ground. Al-Shabaab has faced severe setbacks including losing Mogadishu, the strategic port of Kismayo and other urban centres, although it retains an underground presence in these areas. The group has also been weakened by infighting between hardline and more moderate elements resulting in the breakaway of several large factions. Mogadishu is ostensibly more secure than it has been in twenty years, many are returning from the diaspora, and the economy is predicted to expand dramatically in 2013.

In August 2012, the selection of the new Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) brought an end to eight years of transitional institutions and has raised expectations: neither its President (Hassan Sheikh) nor its Prime Minister (Abdi Shirdoon) are significantly connected to Somalia's violent past and they have established a lean and technocratic government. They have defined a "Six-Pillar" strategy focused on stability, economic recovery, peacebuilding, service delivery, international relations, and national unity. In September 2013, an optimistic international community pledged over \$2 billion to support the recovery. However, the speed with which this will be translated into tangible support remains a concern, and anxieties about endemic corruption and weak government institutions continue.

But Al-Shabaab has shown itself capable of continuing a classic insurgency, hitting hard in urban areas and beyond the Somali border – witness the horror of Nairobi's Westgate Mall attack. Without AMISOM, backed by the UN Security Council (particularly the US and UK), previous transitional governments and the current FGS would have collapsed. But AMISOM cannot eliminate Al-Shabaab; it is overstretched and up to 3,000 troops (more than in any UN peacekeeping operations) have been killed. Al-Shabaab has reorganised for a long guerrilla campaign and now appears to be led by the hardline Ahmed Godane.

Disputes between the FGS and local clans allow Al-Shabaab to maintain its capacity to hit government officials and high-profile targets. A dispute over the administration of newly recovered Jubaland (the three southern provinces) put the FGS on a collision course with internal and regional allies (particularly Kenya) until an Ethiopian-brokered agreement created an Interim Jubaland Administration in August.⁶ However, continued regional intervention has allowed Al-Shabaab to occupy the nationalist high ground, making the government look both helpless and beholden to neighbouring states.

This raises important questions about the regional and international effort to stabilise Somalia. The Government and its partners – in particular the US, the UK and Turkey as well as Gulf and Muslim states – need to articulate clear common goals that extend beyond their own narrow security interests. After six years of AMISOM operations (and, prior to that, Ethiopia's unilateral intervention in 2006 as well as Kenya's intervention from 2011), coupled with extensive US military assistance, the approach, while delivering some tangible results, is evidently not sufficient. The Somali security sector, which costs hundreds of millions of dollars and has been paid for by the international community since 2000, has been ineffective against Al-Shabaab and has exacerbated instability. The policy of "uprooting terrorism" has arguably radicalised some Somalis into backing a group – Al-Shabaab – that they perceive as liberators against foreign intervention.⁷

6 In 2009, the Government of Kenya devised a plan to create a regional administration in the Somali province bordering Kenya as a buffer between it and areas controlled by Al-Shabaab. This included training anti-Shabaab militias drawn from the Jubaland clans to help remove the group from Kismayo. See Crisis Group Africa Report N°184, *The Kenyan Military Intervention in Somalia*, (15 February, 2012), p.2.

7 See also Alex de Waal, "Getting Somalia right this time", *The New York Times*, 21 February, 2012.

The prevailing consensus, at least in the short term, seems to be to take the fight to Al-Shabaab. Following the September attack in Nairobi, there have been calls for increased Western and AU support to the FGS.⁸ On 4 October, the U.S. Navy SEALs responded with a dramatic raid on the Somali coastal town of Barawe. Somalia will require sustained international security assistance for years. AMISOM will continue to be essential, alongside the new UN Assistance Mission (UNSAM), which began operating in June 2013 with a focus on strategic, political and peacekeeping advice to the FGS and AMISOM, as well as state building.⁹ An eventual exit strategy will also hinge upon successful security sector development. However, stabilisation requires robust political outreach including nationwide negotiations (especially on federalism), power-sharing, socio-economic development, and improved governance.

Somalia's immediate threat may appear to be Al-Shabaab and terrorism, but its long term challenge will be to agree on a new political dispensation that accommodates the various parts of Somalia. AMISOM and the fledgling security forces must be complemented with much more investment in rebuilding and ensuring institutions are accountable. The lesson of military interventions, particularly in Somalia, is that they should support a political process. Any military engagement must feed into a clear plan of action, even when opponents are not prepared to engage politically.

4. The Central African Republic: Many forces, but no leader

If ever there was a case for an approach combining sustained military pressure, mediation, and transitional state-building, the Central African Republic (CAR) must be it. But the international response to the March 2013 coup has, to put it mildly, lacked decisiveness. Diverging interests and competition – initially between the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and South Africa after the latter's disastrous unilateral intervention, and between ECCAS and the AU to take the lead in resolving the crisis – have complicated regional action.¹⁰ The Central African Republic hosts a number of foreign troops but none appeared able, or even willing, to step in.

Fragility, poor governance, coups, civil war, poverty and instability have characterised the Central African Republic's 53 year history. In December 2012, the Seleka rebel coalition made swift advances southward, threatening the capital Bangui and the government of President Bozizé. At Bozizé's request, Chad provided urgent military reinforcements while ECCAS led international mediation. At a meeting in N'Djamena, Chad, on 21 December a roadmap to resolve the crisis was agreed. In January 2013, negotiations took place in Libreville, Gabon, under the aegis of ECCAS. The Libreville talks went well. Bozizé stated that he was ready to negotiate and to establish a government of national unity; he also pledged not to run for a third term in the 2016 Presidential election. ECCAS encouraged Bozizé to make further concessions, and he agreed to hold legislative elections within a year. However, it did not all go the rebels' way: they secured neither the immediate departure of Bozizé nor the position of Prime Minister, which was granted to the democratic opposition.

However, in March 2013 a new push by the rebels led to Bozizé's fall. The coup was hardly surprising: the Libreville agreement had neither a monitoring component nor an enforcement mechanism. Since March, the country has seen worsening security and a huge humanitarian crisis, along with widespread human rights abuses. The state is largely absent. Seleka's rebellion has also stoked previously dormant inter-communal tensions, mostly between Christians and Muslims, while the movement itself is increasingly divided.

8 In a letter to the Security Council on 14 October, the UN Secretary-General called for enhancement of the Somalia National Army and AMISOM capacity.

9 UNSOM has a hugely ambitious mandate and will integrate the many UN agencies active in Somalia, acting as "a single door to knock on".

10 See Crisis Group Africa Report N°203, Central African Republic: Priorities of the Transition, (11 June, 2013).

Regionally, there has been an uneasy mix of de facto recognition of the new dispensation with a transitional framework established under international supervision. The international community, particularly the UN and France, has pursued the all too familiar “wait-and-see” approach; the slow pace of decision-making was symptomatic of its inability to think more innovatively. Meanwhile, the situation on the ground kept deteriorating.

The CAR's former colonial power, France (already deeply engaged in Mali) appears to have little appetite to become directly drawn into the crisis. It has a small force in Bangui focused on securing the airport and its local interests, but it prefers an African response. An increasingly assertive AU wants a prominent role in resolving the crisis. French-sponsored Security Council Resolution 2121 (10 October, 2013), therefore, reinforces and widens the mandate of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA) and calls for the establishment of an AU-led international support mission (MISCA).

On paper, the resolution fulfils the political and military requirements necessary to prevent further deterioration of the situation and attempts to restore the functioning of the state including judicial, economic and social reforms along with measures aimed at re-establishing security and public services as well as organising elections. Also vital are much-needed human rights monitoring, security sector reform and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration. But will this latest resolution be implemented quickly enough? There are concerns that the AU force that should back the transitional agreement is unlikely to be operational before 2014, far too late to reverse the country's descent into lawlessness. The crisis in CAR is more than just insecurity in Bangui and other major regions; national, regional and international responses need to focus on a comprehensive political and development agenda, recognising that a weakened interim government needs a protective security umbrella to begin these tasks. Crucially, ECCAS needs to ensure rigorous monitoring of the Libreville agreement and follow-up commitments.

5. Conclusion

A combination of politics and the use of force is currently underpinning external engagement in Mali, the DRC, and the CAR. In the end, the UN resolution on Mali struck a balance between, on the one hand, security and, on the other, politics and dialogue – although it remains to be seen whether the UN mission will be able to maintain a suitable balance. The crisis in eastern Congo severely tested international capacity to devise prescriptions that can realistically avert a regional crisis, but it also creates a dangerous path: the UN provides security for weak governments, in effect leading the international community to preserve poor state leadership and contribute to its militarisation. The weaker these states get, the more dependent they become. Having been compromised in this way, the UN can lose its reputation as an honest broker which is able to mediate in order to end crises. The preference for security measures (such as those on display in the DRC and Somalia) has made it difficult to find ways to shift the most fragile societies towards sustainable peace.

Military intervention and pressure is important, but it must be complemented by tailored political intervention that encourages credible state institutions to develop. Fragile countries, such as the CAR, need ongoing security support as well as a framework to properly follow up on peace agreements. These are resource intensive interventions; they cannot be successfully achieved on a shoestring, nor can they be sustained without both military and diplomatic support.