



'RENAISSANCE PEACEKEEPING' — A South African solution to conflict in the DRC?

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INTRODUCTION

Since the advent of democracy in 1994, domestic and international expectations have steadily grown regarding South Africa's new role as a responsible and respected member of the international community. These expectations have included the hope that the country will play a leading role in a variety of international, regional and subregional forums, and that it will become an active participant in attempts to resolve various regional and international conflicts. Such notions have been strongly reinforced by international efforts to build indigenous peacekeeping capacities and the ill-conceived slogan of 'African solutions to African problems'.

The South African approach to conflict resolution has hitherto been strongly informed by its own recent history and experience in the peaceful resolution of seemingly intractable conflicts. Thus, while Pretoria may be compelled to participate in peace missions to alleviate the plight of other peoples who are struggling to resolve similar conflicts, it would prefer to do so through diplomacy rather than through resort to the military instrument. However, it seems that the current crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) may precipitate an atypical intervention by South Africa.

It is clear that the conflict in the DRC will not 'go away' in a hurry, and that South Africa, among others, will remain subject to multiple pressures to 'do something' to help put an end to the fighting. The military situation points to a stalemate, rather than to major battles and decisive victories by one side or the other — at least until such a time as there is a major shift in the balance of forces. This 'not real war — not real peace' situation militates against a genuine will for compromise at the negotiating table, as have been witnessed in the proliferation of unsuccessful attempts to broker or negotiate a cease-fire agreement.

South Africa clearly prefers the role of peacemaker to that of peacekeeper. However, the outcomes of the Lusaka ministerial meeting of 16 January and the Windhoek mini-summit of 18 January 1999 would indicate that Pretoria has been 'upstaged' as peacemaker by those who are directly involved in the conflict. It seems that one increasingly has to put one's troops where one's mouth is to be taken seriously as a peacebroker in Africa.

This is not to suggest that the Windhoek cease-fire agreement will hold, nor that it will be embraced by either Kinshasa or the ??? (RCD). While the latter has welcomed the agreement in principle, the rebels have also made it quite clear that signature will depend upon direct talks with Kabila that will lead to a far-reaching agreement on a transition to federal democratic rule in the DRC. The chances of such conditions being met, by all calculations, must be very slim indeed.

The latter observation has important implications for Pretoria's foreign policy options, which may be reduced to questions of what to do:

- with a firm cease-fire and peace agreement in place;
- if a 'shaky' a cease-fire agreement is engineered; or
- if no cease-fire agreement can be reached.

The answers to such questions will not necessarily be the product of a rational decision-making process, but will more likely represent a cost-benefit analysis driven by the confluence of diverse pressures on Pretoria to be seen at least as assisting the peace process in the DRC. However, there is a 'revolutionary' South African proposal that may just lead to a meaningful process of peace support in the DRC — an idea that I have dubbed 'Renaissance peacekeeping'.

CEASE-FIRE AND PEACE AGREEMENT

In the unlikely event that there is a *rapprochement* between Kabila and the RCD, and that this leads to a cease-fire predicated upon a more comprehensive agreement on a process that will lead the DRC towards more popular government, Pretoria's options should be pretty clear. There would be immense pressure on the United Nations and the international community to oversee and assist with the peace process, and such a request would most likely form an integral part of any comprehensive peace agreement reached by the belligerents. South Africa would have little choice but to support such an international effort and there are indeed policy guidelines in place that allow for this.

The White Paper on South African Participation in Peace Missions was approved by Cabinet in October 1998, and will shortly be presented to Parliament. This means that the country's executive is at least morally obliged to follow this guide when contemplating extraterritorial engagements in the service of peace. According to the White Paper, "*South Africa may provide civilian assistance, armed forces and police officers for common international efforts when properly authorised by international and domestic authorities to help in such missions. South Africa will therefore support the United Nations and, where relevant, the Organisation of African Unity and the Southern African Development Community by making an appropriate contribution to international peace missions.*"

In the case of the DRC, an 'appropriate contribution' would mean the maximum contribution possible under the circumstances. The White Paper clearly states that, "*[i]n principle, the level and size of South African contribution to any particular peace mission will depend on how closely the mission relates to national interests and the type of demand that exists for [South African] contributions ...*" A stable and peaceful DRC is obviously a foreign policy priority for Pretoria, and the country's contribution to an international peace operation would have to be both meaningful and visible. This implies a full-range effort involving civilians, civilian police, and a significant military contingent.

Of course, the policy guidelines state that any such contribution would depend upon a "... *clear international mandate, sufficient means, and clear entry and exit criteria.*" These are fairly basic requirements highlighted by the 'lessons learned' from latter-day UN peacekeeping. It is also likely that South Africa would not have to play the role of 'lead nation' for the execution of an operation launched under this scenario, for the mission would have a considerable peacebuilding and developmental component which, because of the financial resources involved, would require significant Western participation.

The notion of a neutral and impartial multifunctional peace mission, based on a firm negotiated settlement to the war in the DRC is obviously the ideal that most observers would hope for. However, there is much (somewhat misguided) interest in launching a multinational mission to prop up whatever kind of cease-fire agreement can be signed in the shortest possible time.

CEASE-FIRE AGREEMENT

Despite the current stance of the RCD, it is possible that all major parties to the DRC conflict may be induced to sign a cease-fire that is not directly connected to a comprehensive peace accord. Indeed, this is the major thrust of current peacemaking initiatives, where the aim is to broker a cease-fire and troop standstill as preconditions for talks that may lead to consensus on a process of political reform and a firm peace agreement. This situation is perhaps the least favourable in terms of South African foreign policy options.

With even a shaky cease-fire agreement in place, Pretoria will come under immense pressure

to enter the DRC as a peacekeeper — not least from the African countries which it wants to engage in the Renaissance ideal. With its leadership of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) already challenged and damaged by a combination of Mugabe's bravado and its own adventures in Lesotho, Pretoria's peacekeeping performance has also not impressed the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). On a visit to South Africa last December, Secretary General Salim Ahmed Salim made it quite clear that he had been disappointed by the 'new' South Africa's reluctance to play a more active role in conflict resolution in Africa.

The problem with getting involved in a peace operation to support a shaky cease-fire is that the UN is unlikely to show much enthusiasm for the effort, and the most that could be hoped for would be a UN Security Council resolution commending the OAU for taking such an initiative. Indeed, it appears that there are contingency plans for an OAU observer mission to support any cease-fire reached in the DRC for as long as it takes to hammer out a comprehensive peace accord. This would be coupled to a follow-on UN peacekeeping operation to supervise and assist in the implementation of the peace agreement.

South Africa has been considering a 'Draft Mechanism for an OAU Observer Mission and a UN Peacekeeping Operation' that has apparently been drafted by 'experts from the UN and the OAU' towards the end of 1998. The most glaring deficiency in this 'mechanism' is its failure to separate the two kinds of missions when proposing the mandate and operational tasks. According to the outline document explaining the 'Draft Mechanism', the operational tasks are as ambitious as any that have ever been proposed by the international community for an African intervention, and their execution would demand incredible political will, as well as massive human and material resources on the part of contributors. This, it is well known, has not been forthcoming in Africa since the debacle in Somalia.

While South Africa would be requested to contribute to the OAU observer mission, this cannot be entirely divorced from the follow-on UN peacekeeping mission. For example, if the mandate of the UN mission is patently over-ambitious and unrealistic, it will not receive the requisite level of international support, and the operation will be stillborn. This would leave any OAU observer mission that had already been deployed, out on a limb, with an open-ended and bankrupt mission.

There is little chance that the means available to African participants could ever hope to match the mandate outlined in the 'Draft Mechanism'. Of specific concern are references to "*control of borders*"; "*prevention of any unauthorised movement*"; and "*ensuring compliance*." These tasks imply a significant amount of executive authority that would, in turn, require an extremely large and robust force with clear powers of enforcement under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Moreover, there is obviously a lack of understanding of the natural challenges to intervention posed by the geography of the DRC, as well as the intricate political intrigues that would be woven into and around the peace process. Simply put, the DRC conflict will not be resolved with a couple of OAU observers — nor with the type of 'Blue Helmet' operation that Africa has witnessed in the past.

Hopefully, decision-makers will heed that part of the peace missions White Paper which states that "*[t]he deployment of a national military contingent requires a clear international mandate. Sufficient collective means must also be available for the execution of this mandate. South African support depends on the principle of volunteerism and clear criteria for entering and exiting the peace mission with our national pride intact.*"

Having said the above, it may be that Pretoria has little option but to succumb to pressures to contribute to an OAU observer mission to the DRC. There is evidence that the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) is in an advanced stage of contingency planning for just such a deployment. The challenge, then, would be for South Africa to ensure that the essence of the mandate is limited to something like the following:

- observation, monitoring and reporting on compliance with the cease-fire agreement;
- surveillance of the borders between the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda (to be realistically specified, depending on the nature of the cease-fire agreement); and
- reporting on all unauthorised border crossings in terms of the cease-fire agreement.

Even with this limited mandate, and assuming that border surveillance would be limited to the eastern DRC where the great lakes form natural barriers, substantial emphasis would have to be placed on aerial surveillance. This is not something that the OAU is experienced in undertaking, and it is especially here that South Africa could perhaps play an important, but limited role. However, there would be severe limits to its efficacy, as the terrain and high levels of cloud cover would severely restrict visibility.

Besides carefully circumscribing South African participation, Pretoria should remain concerned with the overall viability of any mission to the DRC. As the White Paper says, *"[t]he commitment of South African forces to service in peace missions is contingent upon comprehensive mission planning with the relevant national and international authorities to ensure that the form and function of forces committed to such operations are both necessary and sufficient to attain the stated goals and objectives. South Africa will not commit itself to participating in any peace mission which is patently under-resourced and which does not have sufficient means to achieve the set mandate."*

ABSENCE OF A CEASE-FIRE

In the absence of any cease-fire agreement, Pretoria's options *vis-à-vis* Congo are basically reduced to involvement in peacemaking or peace enforcement endeavours. The outcome of successful peacemaking efforts would obviously lead to a cease-fire and peace agreement, and would involve the concomitant policy implications outlined above. As noted in the introductory remarks, however, Pretoria seems to have lost prominence in a plethora of peacemaking initiatives focused on the beleaguered DRC. The latter are bound to have a negative effect on the chances of peaceful settlement, and contradict UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's April 1998 report on Conflict in Africa, which warns against multiple peacemaking efforts.

Unless South Africa is clearly designated by the UN and accepted by the conflicting parties as their peacemaker of choice, and this is respected by other brokers, it would probably be the best for Pretoria not to force its hand at the peacemaking game in the DRC. If there is one clear lesson to be learned from the collapse of the Angolan peace process, it is that the temptation should be resisted to exert pressure on the belligerents to sign a cease-fire agreement to which all or some parties are not really committed. The best option would probably be to remain a concerned and vigilant participant where South Africa's presence is invited, and to continue with quiet bilateral diplomacy (e.g. with Rwanda) where this may contribute to peaceful solutions.

As far as the peace enforcement option is concerned, this is obviously something that would be avoided like the plague by Foreign Affairs, the Department which should lead the way in formulating responses to the crisis in the DRC. The peace missions White Paper states that, *"[a]s any form of participation in peace operations is an extension of South African foreign policy, the Department of Foreign Affairs will be the lead department in co-ordinating such participation."* However, concerns have been raised about the military's 'autonomous' capacity for forceful deployments such as the controversial 'Operation Boleas' in Lesotho.

Not only were many in the Department of Foreign Affairs taken by surprise when 'SADC' troops invaded the mountain kingdom, but the military also seems to have developed a taste for such adventures. Since 1994, the SANDF has resisted pressures to contribute to international peacekeeping, citing integration problems and budgetary restrictions as the major excuses. After the October 1998 Lesotho incursion, military attitudes have done an about-turn on the issue of peace operations. For example, after leading an OAU mandated military fact-finding mission to the Comoro Islands in December 1998, South African officers began contingency planning for a military intervention to halt the hostilities on Anjouan. According to sources within the organisation, the use of paratroopers and special forces was being considered.

Having said the above, it should be noted that the South African military has a healthy respect for the supremacy of its civilian masters, and would never attempt to 'go it alone' with a peace enforcement operation. Nor is the military likely to convince the ministers that anything could be achieved by forceful intervention in the DRC. Despite deeply troubling reports of gross

human rights violations and conflict-related suffering among the civilian population, there is clearly little utility in attempting to launch a 'peace enforcement' operation in the DRC. Even if there were agreement on a workable doctrine for such action, the geography and demography of the DRC would make a mockery of the mission planners. Moreover, the South African peace missions White Paper clearly requires UN Security Council authorisation before South African troops will be committed to forceful operations — and this is unlikely to be forthcoming in the case of the DRC.

However, it is not impossible for South Africa to become involved in the DRC under the type of pretexts outlined above, only to have the cease-fire collapse once its troops are deployed in the mission area. This is an ever-present risk to all contributors to contemporary peace support operations, but it is particularly salient in the case of a mission to the DRC. The time may therefore be ripe for lending serious consideration to 'unique' and unconventional solutions to a seemingly intractable problem.

'RENAISSANCE' PEACEKEEPING

The major obstacle (and there are many) to the success of all the various peace plans presently on the table for the DRC is the fact that they all call for a multinational peacekeeping force to be deployed within a matter of days of the signing of a cease-fire agreement. This is a patently unrealistic expectation, and it will have to be modified if there is to be any chance of a negotiated settlement. The one option would be to re-conceptualise the sequential order of the peace process itself; i.e. to insist on a comprehensive negotiated political settlement *before* the deployment of any peacekeepers. However, with no supervision, the integrity of the cease-fire would be under constant threat if this route were to be chosen. The other option would be to revisit the very notion of peacekeeping itself in relation to the convoluted conflict situation in the DRC.

The concept of 'Renaissance' peacekeeping is thus dubbed because of its origins in a proposal by Thabo Mbeki to the leaders of Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, on modalities for ending the war in the DRC. It recognises a number of harsh realities in the situation in this country which necessitate an unconventional approach to peacemaking, such as:

- the obvious inability of a UN peacekeeping force to guarantee the security of the extensive borders between the DRC and its nine neighbouring countries;
- the similar inability of such a force to effectively disarm the non-government forces and civilians in the DRC;
- the inability of the Kabila government to establish administrative control throughout the DRC at any time soon after the signing of a cease-fire; and
- the proliferation of non-statutory combat forces operating within and around the DRC, such as UNITA, former FAZ, former FAR and Interhamwe, the FDD, the RCD, the Mai-Mai, the LRA, the Ninja's and the Zulu's.

The essence of 'Renaissance' peacekeeping lies in the idea of inviting those (statutory) forces currently engaged in the military conflict in the DRC to contribute to a multinational operation designed to bring peace to the country. Although a multinational rather than a UN force, it is envisaged that the peacekeepers would have a force commander from a 'neutral' country and that the operation would be mandated and financed by the OAU and the UN.

Aside from the fact that the UN has yet to finance a multinational peacekeeping force not under its control (and that the OAU could not raise sufficient money), this idea flies in the face of all conventional wisdom on the concept and conduct of peacekeeping operations. For example, the peacekeepers could hardly be regarded as impartial (after having tried to kill one another), and it is unlikely that their presence would be welcomed by all the (other) major parties to the current conflict. On the other hand, it is also patently clear that the 'ONUMOZ' recipe, which was so successful in Mozambique, cannot be applied to the DRC, and that there are clear advantages in co-opting belligerents as peacekeepers. For example:

- the multinational force could be quickly established (in a matter of days, rather than months);
- the contingents would already have extensive knowledge of the area of operations (but would require some generic or attitudinal peacekeeping training);

- the continued presence of these contingents in the DRC would give all the external players a face-saving opportunity to rotate troops and gradually draw down their military presence in the country after a successful mission; and
- the above would also go a long way towards addressing the security concerns of troop-contributing countries while a more lasting peace is negotiated.

Moreover, the same troops that have seen combat in the DRC would not have to stay on indefinitely, but should be replaced with fresh troops from the various troop-contributing countries as a matter of normal military personnel policy. It should therefore only be a matter of months before the combatant troops *in situ* at the time of cease-fire are rotated out of the mission area and replaced with new troops who would be deployed afresh as peacekeepers. In the interim, issuing all contingents of the multinational force with some kind of common (OAU?) insignia and *accoutrements* and a small daily mission service allowance might go a long way towards converting the belligerents into peacekeepers. The question, of course, is who would foot the bill?

The issue of command and control is somewhat more problematic than envisaged in the 'Renaissance' plan. The latter sees the multinational force (known as a Joint Task Team or JTT) resorting under the command of an 'OAU Monitoring Team'. This is clearly an extremely fragile arrangement that ignores existing capabilities and realities. A slightly modified version of the Renaissance JTT, however, may solidify the command and control issue and help lend substance to the idea of a 'neutral' force commander.

Although not explicitly stated, the Renaissance peacekeeping concept excludes, for obvious reasons, a role for the multiplicity of non-statutory military forces presently operating on DRC soil. It would be extremely difficult for these non-government actors to buy into the Renaissance peacekeeping deal if the JTT was to be composed only of troops from the armies of Angola, Chad, Namibia, Somalia and Zimbabwe, on the one hand, and Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, on the other. Psychologically, at least, the odds of fair treatment would seem to be stacked against the RCD alliance under such an arrangement. It is therefore suggested that the JTT should be composed of the regional belligerents plus one. This additional troop-contributing country would ideally be from another continent (adding to the credibility of impartial command), and have sufficient resources to play the role of lead nation.

The out-of-area troop-contributing country would also reinforce the linkage of the peace operation to broader peacebuilding efforts by the international community and international system. Without such linkages, of course, any peacekeeping operation would be doomed to eventual irrelevance. The choice of lead nation would obviously not be easy — not least because of the risks involved in intervening according to an untested formula. Nevertheless, 'Renaissance' peacekeeping offers the enterprising and truly committed country an opportunity to reverse the trend towards perceived international impotence when challenged with the need to resolve violent conflicts in Africa.

The 'Renaissance' peacekeepers would also need to enjoy extremely robust rules of engagement in order to execute a mandate that must include disarmament and demobilisation of all non-statutory forces on the DRC's territory. This implies a Chapter VII mandate from the UN Security Council, and a willingness to use minimum necessary force to implement the mission mandate. While the regional contingents may be somewhat accustomed to campaigning with force, it may be difficult to find an out-of-area partner to engage in the type of muscular intervention that would be required to bring peace to the DRC.

The idea of an extracontinental partner in the JTT may therefore be stillborn, but 'Renaissance' peacekeeping might still survive with a strong African lead nation. Although committed to a withdrawal by May 1999, Nigeria may remain bogged down with its contribution to 'muscular' peacekeeping under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States' Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in Sierra Leone. Egypt is probably less likely to muster the political will or support needed for a Central African adventure. South Africa may therefore be the lead nation of choice, if only by default and the fact that it was Pretoria that advanced the idea of 'Renaissance' peacekeeping in the first place.

CONCLUSION

The dynamics of the conflict in the DRC, the current military situation 'on the ground', and the status of ongoing diplomatic efforts to broker an end to the war, all serve to constrain South Africa's foreign policy options. Pretoria has had to take a back seat to countries such as Zambia, Zimbabwe and even Libya in what has amounted to an African summitry circus. In addition, South Africa, for a variety of valid reasons, has not been active in seeking solutions to the related conflicts in Angola, the Central African Republic, and Congo-Brazzaville, as well as those in Rwanda and Uganda. Given the type of constraints and limited opportunities outlined above, Pretoria would be well advised to proceed with caution on the DRC.

While there is no use crying over spilled milk, South Africa's opportunity to make a major contribution to lasting peace and stability in the DRC passed in October 1997. This was when Pretoria joined a number of eager African states in recognising self-appointed President Kabila's 'democratic' republic and welcoming it, without prejudice, into the bosom of SADC. Now the proverbial chickens have come home to roost. Rather than benefit from the potential wealth of the DRC, SADC has virtually been torn apart by its membership.

Looking forward, Pretoria should sensibly abide by a limited and uninspiring role in resolving the current crisis in the DRC, while focusing attention on how best to engage whatever post-conflict regime emerges during the peacebuilding process and beyond. The latter should obviously inform the type of contribution that South Africa would make to an eventual peace support operation, and hopefully help to inform the type of mandate that is accepted by all contributors. The concept of 'Renaissance' peacekeeping is a potentially meaningful contribution to the efforts of those who would like to see an urgent cease-fire in the DRC, but it may also serve to hasten the deployment of South African troops to Congolese soil.

Of course, the ability of any particular country to influence the mandate of an international peace operation will depend not only upon the size of its brain, but also on the size of the muscle it is willing to flex. Here public opinion comes into play as, according to the policy guidelines, *"South Africa will not participate in any mission that is inconsistent with South African values, or that cannot be justified to the South African public ... [A]n extensive media campaign should be launched prior to the deployment of a national military contingent for service in international peace support operations, to ensure that requisite levels of popular and political support are sustained for the operation."*

The latter aspect provides at least some circumstantial evidence that Pretoria is indeed prepared to commit forces to the DRC. The SANDF has recently been attempting to inform public opinion favourably on the notion and desirability of foreign 'peacekeeping' adventures. In mid-December, for example, the Chief of Joint Operations appeared on national television pleading for popular support should the SANDF go to Comoros, as did the force commander of the Lesotho operation. Subsequently, both the print and electronic media have begun to lend an unprecedented degree of prominence to the whole issue of peacekeeping.

There can be little doubt that South Africa will be drawn inexorably into participating in whatever form of multinational peace operation is devised for Congo. The latter may quite well be based on misguided peacemaking efforts that force the pace to achieve a fragile cease-fire that is destined to crumble. The best that Pretoria can do is to cling to whatever rational policy guidelines it has on the way in, and then to ride the tiger for all its worth.

ENDNOTES

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1. The *Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie* is the most important group of Congolese rebels within the East Great Lakes coalition.
2. Aside from its glaring lack of institutional structure for conflict management, SADC can obviously not be considered a neutral or impartial instrument for such intervention.
3. This factor also raises a number of issues regarding the type of operational doctrine that would be applicable to the JTT, and this will be discussed below.

4. For an elaboration of the notion of 'international law enforcement', see M Malan, 'Peace Enforcement': The Real Peace Support Challenge in Africa, *African Security Review*, 7(5), 1998, pp. 11-25.