



ISS Seminar Report

The AU-UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur: A Force Commanders Perspective on the Pitfalls, Challenges and Prospects of Mandate implementation in a Complex Mission

Pretoria, 1 October 2008

Speaker: General Martin Luther Agwai, UNAMID Force Commander; Former Force Commander UNAMSIL and Military Advisor to the UN Secretary General in UN HQ

Chairperson: Dr. Kwesi Aning, Head of Conflict Prevention Management and Resolution Department (CPMRD) of the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) in Accra, Ghana.

The seminar was organized by the Training for Peace Programme (TfP) of the ISS. The Seminar kicked off at 9:35 with the opening remark by the head of TfP, Colonel Festus Aboagye, who welcomed all the participants, especially the speaker, General Martin Luther Agwai. He introduced the chairperson, Dr. Kwesi Aning, and acknowledged the presence of representatives of government departments and agencies, as well as various embassies and organisations. In introducing the subject of the seminar, Festus particularly highlighted the uniqueness of the AU-UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and the immense difficulties it is faced with. He expressed the expectation that General Agwai's presentation, reflecting his personal experiences on the ground in the capacity as UNAMID's Force Commander, will help to provide deep insights into this complex operation, thereby enhancing understanding of the complexities and multiplicity of the operation's challenges.

Dr. Kwesi Aning further introduced General Martin Luther Agwai and acknowledged the achievements and the high rise of General Agwai to some of the topmost position in professional military career. He also emphasised the significance of

UNAMID and the complexities of the Darfur situation, before inviting the General to speak.

General Agwai started by expressing his pleasure to be at Africa's most acknowledged research institute on peace and security which, he hoped, would provide an opportunity to put the situation of the operation and the Darfur conflict as one of the most important agenda items in the discourse and decision-making by the international community. According to him, his presentation seeks to depict the actual realities of what he calls an 'unclear situation'.

Moving on to the substantive part of his presentation, General Agwai pointed out the danger that conflicts pose to human survival. He expressed the academic view that in the present situation of nuclear and other conventional armaments, conflicts may lead to the extinction of humanity, if not properly managed.

Regarding the conflict in Darfur, General Agwai emphasised that it is an oversimplification to treat it as a conflict between nomadic Arab tribes affiliated with Khartoum, and farming African communities in the region. He said that the Darfur conflict traces its origin back to socio-economic/environmental changes and political reforms introduced in Sudan in the 1980s. The current conflict is in part a continuation of the fierce competition that these conditions had led to, among the diverse ethnic groups inhabiting the Darfur region. He pointed out that the conflict is also attributable to various other factors, including historical violence, ethnic divisions and socio-economic marginalization, among others.

He argued that the combination of these various factors contributed to the eruption of the conflict in 2003. In addition to political marginalisation, he cited the peace process between the north and south as one of the factors that has influenced high expectations among a section of the people of Darfur, who then had mobilised themselves politically and militarily against the Government of Sudan (GoS). There was also the dynamic of cross-border insurgent activities between Sudan and Chad that is further complicating efforts at resolving the conflict. General Agwai identified four groups that were party to the conflict at the early stages. These were the GoS and the Janjaweed, on the one hand, and the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement (SLA/M) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), on the other.

General Agwai observed that like any government the response of the GoS was initially to militarily bring the rebellion under control. However, following the emergence of the Janjaweed militia on the side of the GoS, the conflict led to one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world, as hundreds of thousands lost their lives and many more others were displaced and fled into neighbouring countries, notably Chad and the Central African Republic.

It was in light of these conditions, according to General Agwai, that the AU initiated a peace process that eventually led to the signing of the Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement (HCFA) of 8 April 2004, between the GoS, and the JEM and SLA/M. Subsequently, the establishment of a Ceasefire Commission (CFC) paved the way for the deployment of the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS).

General Agwai argued that the widely-held perception that AMIS was a failure is an error resulting from the wrong assumption that AMIS was a peacekeeping operation. He said that the role of AMIS was only one of observation and it was inappropriate for the world to expect AMIS with under 8 000 military and police personnel, to provide protection to the civilian population in a place equal to the size of Kenya, or twice that of Ghana.

In the view of General Agwai, one of the problems that AMIS was confronted with was its character as a donor-driven and donor-dependent mission, having been established with the expectation that donor countries would provide much of the financial and logistical support to the mission. It however took about a year before donors fulfilled much of their commitments. General Agwai maintained that in spite of various limitations, AMIS was successful within the limits of its meagre resources and the specificities of its mandate. He listed the successes of AMIS to include: observation of the ceasefire agreement, deployment of police officers, dissemination of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) of May 2006, to Darfurians, and its efforts to create conditions for peace.

General Agwai pointed out that UNAMID was initially conceived as a full UN mission, based on the provisions of UNSCR 1706 (2006) for the deployment of 20,000 troops to Darfur in replacement of AMIS. However, as is history now, this was vehemently rejected not only by the GoS, but by the AU, as well; the GoS insisted on a UN force of only 200, a tenth of the proposed strength. In the meantime, the AU peace process culminated in the signing of the DPA, leading to the establishment of the UN's Light Support Package (LSP) from November 2006 until May 2007. But before the Heavy Support Package could be fully deployed, the UN passed Resolution 1769 (2007), establishing the 26 000 strong UNAMID. His main argument here was that UNSCR 1769 was in some ways too ambitious, in asking for the operation to be fully deployed by 31 December 2007, not to mention the wild expectations that it created among the people of Darfur and within the international community at large.

According to General Agwai, the pitfalls of the Hybrid Operation are multiple. The most significant of these is its almost impossible task of keeping peace where there is no peace to keep. Although the AU's peace initiative led to the signing of a peace agreement in Abuja, it was only signed by the GoS and Minni Minawi's SLM/A-MM, while the other major rebel movements stood opposed to the agreement. This has subsequently led to splintering and proliferation of rebel movements, arguably about 30 in all. Given these developments, AMIS became the target of military attacks by some of the rebel groups and this trend has continued to UNAMID, which has also become a victim of similar attacks.

General Agwai pointed out that some analysts had catalogued a number of flaws of UNSCR 1769, notably: the omission of the no-fly zone, silence on the proxy border attacks between Sudan and Chad, the predominantly African character of UNAMID and the provisions regarding the disarming of the Janjaweed. He said that he does not share some of these, such as in particular the omission of the no-fly zone.

One point that came out clearly from General Agwai's presentation was that some analysts and members of the international community do not sufficiently appreciate the fact that UNAMID's operation is faced with immense challenges. He rejected the perception that UNAMID is not doing enough and cited the following short list of the challenges:

- UNAMID is often caught between the conflicts that pits GoS against the rebels, rebels against rebels, Arabs against Africans, Africans against Africans, bandits against civilians, Janjaweed against rebels, Sudan against Chad
- UNAMID still has less than 10 000 troops, a little more than the strength of AMIS and far less than the 26 000 required
- UNAMID has no new equipment, no spare parts, and is faced with the reality that after some five years of usage, the AMIS equipment bequeathed to it is fast deteriorating
- Nevertheless, UNAMID has expanded the number and types of its patrols with the same equipment and manpower, from 200 and 250 a month to 700 a month
- There are no proper roads for the transportation of the heavy equipment, as well as personnel. There is only one port that serves not only UNAMID, Sudan's own imports and exports. Added to this is the lengthy main supply route that links this port to Darfur, a portion of which is bad going
- The total lack of utility (18) and attack (6) helicopters
- Lac of sufficient engineering capability to build camps and routes
- The limited capacity of airports in Darfur to receive heavy aircraft
- The confusion over higher command and control, including coordination, between the AU and the UN
- Continuing attacks on IDPs and civilians
- Increasing banditry, especially carjakings of both mission and humanitarian vehicles, which becoming one of the biggest challenges for UNAMID's operation
- The ICC indictment of and the request for a warrant of arrest of President Al Bashir, casting a huge doubt on the future integrity of UNAMID. He refused to be drawn on the likely impact of the President's arrest

General Agwai pointed out that despite these challenges and the various limitations, UNAMID has made tremendous achievements. He however regretted the fact that its achievements are not sufficiently recognized and appreciated. According to him, the major achievements of UNAMID relate to the protection of civilians and humanitarian activities. In terms of civilian protection, UNAMID's role includes escorting vulnerable segments of local communities, such as women and children, to

collect firewood; meeting with members of the different local communities and providing mediation in local disputes; and investigation of ceasefire violations, among others. The humanitarian role of UNAMID involves escorting UN agencies and other NGOs involved in the provision of humanitarian assistance, as well as the provision of medical assistance to the wounded and sick.

Although these challenges are enormous, General Agwai said that there is hope for UNAMID to successfully accomplish its mandate. In this regard, he expressed his satisfaction with the appointment of the joint mediator for Darfur, Djibril Bassole, and the subsequent resumption of the peace process. He expressed the hope that the capacity of UNAMID is also expected to increase with the arrival of new contributions, including those from Egypt, Ethiopia, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Tanzania and, hopefully, Thailand.

General Agwai addressed various questions posed by the participants. Responding to the question of whether helicopters are critical to the work of UNAMID, General Agwai said that without helicopters the operation is doomed to fail. He challenged members of the international community to demonstrate their full commitment to the success of the operation by contributing not only helicopters but also other basic logistics necessary for the execution of the operation. He stated that in light of the prevailing regional dynamics of the conflict the idea of a no-fly zone will pose more problematic to the operation.

Asked whether Africans should find African solution to the Darfur crisis or whether there is a role for the international community to play, General Agwai responded that there are various roles that the international community can play, but Africans should take the lead. This is not only because they have deeper understanding of the specificities and context of conflicts within the continent, but also because they should not stand and watch when violent conflicts erupt until others within the international community respond. He argued that the idea of African solutions to African problems was an imperative originating from the decline in the continent's strategic importance following the end of the cold war and the lack of interest that members of the international community showed, to adequately and promptly respond to conflicts in Africa.

In addressing the question of lessons that need to be drawn from the Abuja peace process and the mediation General Agwai said that one of the critical tasks that the new mediator has to accomplish is to bring together the highly divided rebel movements together to help them establish a common position on key issues that they would like to negotiate on with the GoS. According to him, the previous mediation had two weaknesses that the present mediation seeks to rectify, namely that the earlier mediators were not based in Sudan. He also pointed out that unlike the Abuja process, which had two mediators, the current mediation has one, and this will help to obviate conflicts in the approaches adopted for the peace process.

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