THE CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENTAL PEACE MISSIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MILITARY AND CIVILIANS

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Introduction

Jean-Marie Guéhenno, the United Nations (UN) Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping, once remarked, “we have [UN] peacekeeping operations that succeed, only to lapse back into conflict. Successful operations, as it were, in which the patient dies.” These comments are particularly true in Africa where ceasefires are fragile, peace efforts often fail to disarm and demobilise combatants or reintegrate former ones, and post-conflict societies often relapse into conflict in the face of continued poverty, famine and disease. Evidently, an alternative approach to the planning and implementing of UN missions and responses to violent conflict is needed.

Because the underlying causes of conflict are so complex, this alternative approach should, in theory, achieve sustainable human development through the integrated application of security and developmental efforts. Indeed, two enduring lessons that the UN has learned through years of experience in responding to conflict is that, first, successful operations require integrated efforts, not separate tracks that do not converge, and secondly, that speed and momentum do matter in peace missions. These lessons are especially relevant if one considers that there is strong evidence of recidivism in theatres where UN troops have been stationed, as witnessed in Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and more recently in Côte d’Ivoire and Sudan.

Above: A central tenet of the concept of developmental peace missions is that security and development are mutually reinforcing processes.
In response to the UN’s mixed track record, the former South African Deputy Minister of Defence, Ms Nozizwe Madlala-Roudledge, on one occasion proposed that the UN’s failures in Africa could partly be attributed to its preoccupation with state security, whereas this effort should run concurrently with an equally vital aspect of an overall peace plan, which is the commitment to human security (i.e. reconstruction and development). Madlala-Roudledge argued that an alternative approach to end violent conflict demands filling the institutional and programming void between security (peacekeeping) and development (peacebuilding) – more precisely, that these two veritable pillars of all UN operations are, first, bridged and then ‘rolled-out’ as mutually reinforcing processes.

While the principle behind bringing peacekeeping closer to peacebuilding is hardly new, there is still much to learn institutionally and operationally about how the two activities can best be applied in practice. In this regard, in 2004 Madlala-Roudledge, together with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), pioneered the concept of developmental peace missions, a concept based on the premise that security can only achieve permanent benefits if vital peacebuilding activities are rolled out within a reasonable time. Reasonable, in this sense, means the provision of critical humanitarian assistance and reconstruction capabilities immediately after – and preferably in concert with – military operations so that security can dynamically reinforce and influence the effectiveness of development (i.e. the one activity must be applied without losing sight of the other).

Certainly, the precise time frame for immediate reconstruction will depend on many factors. Even so, experience has shown that the window between the end of military action and the start of development is very narrow: the first few months – if not weeks – following an intervention are perhaps the more critical period for laying the groundwork for peace and establishing the credibility of foreign intervention forces. (‘Groundwork’ is the operative word as short-term interventions must always complement long-term commitments.) Conversely, legitimacy and political momentum lost during this critical period can be difficult to regain, especially if foreign forces are unable to deal satisfactorily with systematic threats against individuals, intimidation, rioting, looting, and attacks on property.

For instance, the inability of the Anglo-American coalition to stabilise Iraq more quickly has highlighted the dangers of being unable to begin reconstruction promptly following the military defeat of opponents. The argument that Iraq was not a peace mission per se, and hence post-Iraq lessons could be ignored by conflict prevention and resolution practitioners, is valid. However, there is an emerging school of thought that maintains that some lessons may lend themselves to the broader international peace and security agenda, chief among these that a bridge to long-term development and democratisation is required to stabilise security environments and begin reconstruction promptly. This concept of operations has been labelled by US officials as ‘stabilisation and reconstruction’ (S&R) and proposes ways to target the gap “between the end of major combat operations and the beginning of nation-building”.2

In this regard, the philosophy behind S&R and developmental peace missions is encouragingly similar. Both concepts seek to directly challenge the traditional, and questionable, dichotomy between providing short-term military security and long-term development in conflict environments. The concepts dramatically differ in terms of their purpose, however. On the one hand, S&R was developed in reaction to the debacle of post-war planning for Iraq and the threat posed by failed states and international terrorist groups. Ostensibly, such a formulation seems primarily driven by concerns of national security and can thus be construed as being a counter-insurgency strategy that uses developmental tools.

On the other hand, the concept of developmental peace missions was formulated in reaction to UN troops struggling to establish a safe and secure environment for peacebuilding. The concept essentially represents an African effort to ensure that reconstruction and development begin immediately after, or ideally concurrently, with the end of major combat action. In sum, it seeks to challenge the trend of recidivism through the integrated mobilisation and application of military and civilian resources in peace missions. For the armed forces, this means establishing a critical window of opportunity for civilian teams to deploy in environments where the mix between conflict and peace is likely to shift back and forth. For civilians, it implies rapidly deploying to the area of operations to meet critical humanitarian needs and set up temporary infrastructure, and progressively

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repair damage to essential services (power, transportation, sanitation, and communications) and catalyse local skills capacity and public administration.

Certainly, early action will not be sufficient for success. Ultimately, the transfer of power, resources and capacities to local actors will define the effectiveness and sustainability of peacebuilding on the ground. A disconnect exist between policy and practice despite lip-service paid to local ownership.

**Civilian Reconstruction: The Missing Face in Peace Missions**

The idea of advancing socio-economic development into conflict resolution is an important consideration for two reasons. First, unwinding armed conflict and the elaborate networks sustaining it means not only going after those involved (difficult enough as this is anyway) but also finding – and funding – alternative livelihoods. After all, peace cannot be imposed; rather, complementary efforts need to be put in place to help peacekeepers prevail over armed combatants and to create sufficient demand for peace and reform at the grass-roots level. Secondly, front-loading civilians with soldiers in unstable theatres does not only apply to providing better humanitarian assistance but also in the area of immediate assistance for reconstruction to begin.

Despite the increased quantitative and qualitative demands for civilian capabilities in peace missions, few UN-contributing states have paid sufficient attention to enhancing their civilian capacities in a systematic way. Unsurprisingly, peace missions lack adequate civilian experts – especially in reconstruction. According to Guéhenno, the armed forces tend to play a more dominant role in UN missions because they are so much easier to deploy – that is, unlike civil servants, they work under a common strategic framework, operate under a permanent budget, and have systems in place that allow for rapid deployment. Accordingly, military troops have been saddled with a disproportionate share of the post-conflict burden, even though they lack formal training to provide essential socio-economic services, and have battled to produce a tangible peace dividend to host populations.

Apart from extensive reliance on the myriad of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to carry out peacebuilding-related activities (their track record, however, is mixed), a significant outcome of the ‘civilian

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Durable stability requires not just the attainment of a secure environment, but also that ordinary citizens have access to basic essential services.

The ‘gap’ in peace missions has been an increasingly strong international shift towards private sector contracting. For some, the participation of private contractors in peace operations is a negative development in the realm of peace and security. Typically, individuals and companies are blamed for instigating and intensifying wars, selling weapons to warring factions, or providing logistical support to actors in conflicts for purely economic ends. Others believe that private companies are reliable, effective and rapidly deployable, and hence capable of curtailing the malicious activities of insurgents and creating the ideal conditions for economic recovery and democratisation. Nonetheless, contractors will continue to be hired in the global market, especially by actors that depend on donor countries, which, in turn, regularly outsource private companies to provide logistical support. It is more effective to draw on the relative capabilities of both the public and private sectors and recognise the complementary benefits of using both from the outset of a peace mission.

Addressing this challenge requires tackling the problem of independent action in the field and ensuring that all actors – UN and non-UN – in the mission area work together under an overall political-strategic framework. To this end, the UN has already taken significant steps towards improving in-house coordination of military and civilian assets on the ground in line with the emerging ‘integrated missions’ concept.

Secondly, the civilian component of peace missions must be bolstered to improve rapid response capabilities. In this regard, the UN’s Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) is exploring ways of improving in-house rapid deployment for mission start-up and reconstruction, inter alia through the development of a roster of approximately 1 000–1 500 career officials that would provide DPKO with a reliable pool of experienced personnel, able to deploy at short notice to fill core mission positions. To support this drive for improved rapid deployment, DPKO’s roster initiative also includes attempts to draw experts from member states and agencies to complement UN staff in the field. Unfortunately, this process has been met by uncertain commitment and insufficient buy-in, not least because the majority of member states do not have any systems in place to systematically identify experts from within or outside government. In fact, one can only doubt whether the UN will be able to field a reliable civilian capacity for peace-building if member states themselves lack appropriate standby or permanent arrangements.

The reasons for this lack of investment are not hard to find. The more obvious of these, perhaps, is that protecting the national interest has always been more
important than responding to international humanitarian crisis. In other words, why bother developing or enhancing national capabilities for peacebuilding when outside humanitarian concerns do not directly threaten the national interest? When such concerns threaten national security, a basic operational principle underpinning peacekeeping has been to achieve military stability. That is, if security is a prerequisite for development, why should state institutions concern themselves with providing humanitarian and developmental assistance when donor agencies can probably do a better job? The net effects of these and other issues can be summarised as follows: first, reconstruction has not been regarded as a core function of government; second, accumulated expertise has been dissipated, important lessons forgotten, and experienced personnel not retained for future missions; and third, civil servants – that is, apart from the military – have lacked mechanisms to study prior peace efforts, to draw appropriate lessons, and to integrate these into future planning.

To be fair, the urgency to strengthen the level of civilian capacity deployed in peace missions has of late gained currency amongst states and regional organisations. Arguably, Iraq has been the primary catalyst for increased strategic debate concerning improved civilian capabilities. More specifically, Iraq has shown the importance of increasing institutional capacity and investing in appropriate skills and technologies that would enable the rapid deployment of qualified civilian personnel abroad.

Thirdly, the need for civilians to match military capability and deployment should also be accompanied by the need to correctly sequence and synergise military and civilian tasks. On the ground, different agencies and institutions will invariably play different roles and take priority across the spectrum of conflict. The armed forces will necessarily play a lead role in providing initial security in a state. As security improves civilian agencies will progressively move to the forefront of the reconstruction process. This begs the question: after major military operations, when is the ‘golden’ period for reconstruction? Although this is a particular issue that requires further analysis, it suffices to say that planners must consider two interrelated points: first, safe security environments are a necessary but not sufficient ingredient for enduring stability; second, persistent conditions of insecurity prevent sustainable reconstruction and development. Invariably, no amount of mediation or coercion will win the peace if ordinary citizens have limited access to essential services – water, electricity, and health – and little prospect of formal employment.

The current security situation in the DRC is a case in point. Soldiers inside the so-called ‘reintegration’ camps – responsible for providing security in this year’s elections in July 2006 – often rampage nearby villages for food and money because they do not get regularly paid. And while these camps seem to offer little but starvation and sometimes a wage, rebel groups are offering the same men US$60 dollars a month to carry on fighting. Meanwhile, the 17 000-strong UN mission is trying to help the DRC’s fledgling army pacify Congo’s lawless east, where militia groups continue to roam and terrorise locals. This situation, coupled with war-related hunger and poverty, has resulted in continuing abuses against the general public and may even place the DRC’s transition period at risk.

So, both the maintenance of law and order and the restoration of basic socio-economic services are critical pre-conditions for successful transition periods and long-term development. In this context, the concept of developmental peace missions seeks to challenge the traditional notion of providing peacekeeping first and then peacebuilding by mainstreaming civilian capabilities to augment the military security function and, at the same time, to properly address the unique challenges of peacebuilding and wider reconstruction efforts.

**Institutional Prerequisites**

To meet the implementation challenge of integrated or hybrid missions, UN-contributing states, like South Africa, cannot continue their ad hoc, piecemeal, and fragmented response to complex emergencies, piecing together makeshift committees or teams for each new crisis. What is needed is an overall political framework and institutional base, backed by permanent staff, for developing plans and procedures for integrated civil-military efforts. Currently, the absence of any specific coordinating entity for reconstruction within Africa’s peace and security architecture contributes to the clouding of priorities, the inefficient use of resources, and the reactive nature of responses. As such, it would be important to establish lead agencies that can provide clear strategic direction, and identify key gaps and clarify roles and responsibilities for responding to conflict and assisting with reconstruction.

To improve integration, such agencies should be endowed with sufficient authority to bring together all the relevant military and civilian agencies when a crisis emerges. In this regard, the establishment of a standing civilian corps for reconstruction will require conducting an inventory of existing capabilities and supporting technologies to determine human resource, organisational, and technical gaps for civilian reconstruction-related activities. Gaps for stability operations will invariably be addressed as Africa has many trained and experienced military peacekeepers but very few civilian experts. Nevertheless, African armed forces should transform and be ready to field the resources required to secure stability and create an enabling environment for reconstruction.
Operational Prerequisites

While the civilian reconstruction dimensions of preventing a return to conflict are increasingly acknowledged, the challenge remains to translate lofty policy commitments into effective, practical tools that can enhance Africa’s reconstruction capacity. A perennial theme for intervening forces will be to help build legitimate and sustainable local capacities and a minimally capable state. This will require, first of all, having a capacity to make assessments of reconstruction and development needs. This is important for two reasons. Up to now, needs assessments have been prepared by international agencies with limited, if any, participation of African institutions (Sudan’s Joint Assessment Missions is case in point). As a result, reconstruction frameworks have been more inclined to serve the interests and priorities of outside actors (not least the financial requirements of international private contractors) as opposed to catalyse local institution and capacity building. Secondly, assessments provide a basic starting point for considering what needs to be done, how it should be done, and who should do it. In so doing, they allow decision-makers to determine priority, precedence, timing, appropriateness, cost, and execution of reconstruction tasks. Since needs assessments determine the nature and scope of reconstruction processes, they are a key entry point for African participation in peace efforts. Developing a capability to actually do reconstruction will invariably take more time to set up. Even so, the development of a group of civilian ‘first-responders’ will be crucial for planning as they will be able to inject greater on-the-ground realities into needs assessments. In this regard, a key task of civil-military operatives will be to decide as to the length of the time interval between initial military response and full-scale developmental assistance. An interval too short might place the lives of civilian reconstruction teams in too excessive a danger; one too long might well negate the benefits derivable from the initial military intervention. However, it is clear that an over-protective view of civilian personnel is bound to dangerously lengthen the gap between security and developmental efforts and possibly place the whole mission in jeopardy.

Conclusion

To overcome the mantra of ‘African solutions for African problems’, Africa needs permanent institutions, and not makeshift committees, plug-and-play forces, and rosters of experts, to improve integrated planning and action in peace missions. This effort will not be easy to implement on the ground, however. It will require, first, taking risks to demonstrate early tangible results in operational theatres where the mix between conflict and peace is likely to shift back and forth. Secondly, it will demand the unity of effort of the diverse military and civilian actors involved in a mission. Thirdly, it will demand establishing dedicated institutions at the national, regional, and/or continental levels to improve coordination and planning among departments and agencies (including the military) in order to mobilise the appropriate resources required for international peace missions in a timely and more consistent manner. Lastly, and this is a critical point, it will demand the creation of a standby or standing civilian reconstruction capacity that can rapidly deploy with the military to make assessments of reconstruction needs and fast-track the delivery of basic services and essential infrastructure.

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Endnotes


3 Binnendijk and Johnson, ‘Transforming for stabilisation and reconstruction operations’, op cit., p. xiv. It is worth noting that US officials are increasingly using the term ‘Stability Operations’ (and Reconstruction) rather than ‘Stabilisation’ – an effort, perhaps, to underscore the military nature of trying to restore the rule of law.

4 Remarks made by Jean-Marie Guéhenno, UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping, at a workshop on ‘State-building and strengthening of civilian administration in post-conflict societies and failed states’, 21 June 2004, New York, hosted by the Crises Management Initiative (CMI) and the International Peace Academy (IPA).

5 On the issue of utilising private contractors on the battlefield see, for example, Peter W. Singer, ‘Outsourcing War’, Foreign Affairs, 84/2, March/April 2005, pp. 119-132.
