



The United Nations' Involvement in Conflict Resolutions in Africa: The Rwanda Experience (1994 – 2003)

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Abstract: The study aims at interrogating the Rwanda conflict (1993 – 2004) with a view to ascertaining the extent of the United Nation's involvement in the conflict and the roles played by the warring parties; Tutsi and Hutu ethnic nationalities in escalating the crisis. The study adopted the qualitative research method by gathering information from different sources that are relevant to the content. The ideology of ethnic division and hatred between Hutu and Tutsi ethnic nationalities was heightened by colonial administrative policies which favoured one group against the other by introducing an asymmetric poorer structure and class division among the people. Tutsi unequal social structure that placed Tutsi at the helm of affairs became a flash point and the main source of the ethnic violence that later plunged Rwanda into genocide in 1994 where over 800,000 lives were lost. The main objectives of this work therefore is to ascertain the political implications of the United National involvement in the Rwanda crisis of 1994 – 2003. The frustration-aggression theory was used as the theoretical framework of analysis. The work revealed that Rwanda genocide would have been averted if the United Nation had taken stringent and urgent measures. This was as a result of lack of political will by the Secretarial and the Security Council of the U.N.O. to make bold decisions and develop necessary mechanisms to create information and preventive measures.

Keywords: Genocide, Conflict Resolution, Involvement, United Nations and Peace-Keeping.

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INTRODUCTION

The United Nations, among the numerous multi-national and state actors, plays the most critical part in resolving global based conflicts. Most of those peace-keeping missions are under serious criticism because of their political linkages which the United Nations is not an exemption. This criticism is held in two fold; one, the United Nation missions were not able to meet targets performance as presented by the United Nation mandate, and two, some of such missions did not meet expectations of the general public as was seen in the tragic situation of Rwanda genocide. Many criticized United Nations,

America and other key players in the global system for failing to utilize legality situation on genocide in Rwanda case as they unfold, which constituted the failure or excuse not to intervene" (Pamzza, 2004).

The Rwanda conflict now became history of the largest rate of mass murder. Between April and June 1994, over eight hundred thousand (800,000) people, about 10% of Rwanda population were killed in continual killing which lasted for barely hundred (100) days (Destexhe, 1994:34). The IMF and World Bank via "National Institute of Statistics" for Rwanda (NISR), reported that Rwanda demography in 1990 stood at about 7.0 million, but

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by 1994 it dropped to 5.5 million and later grew drastically to 9.6 million in 2008 (IMF and World Bank Report, retrieved from <http://www.worldbank.org/ida>).

This genocide would have been averted, had the United Nations engage in preventive or proactive deployment of troops. Intelligence gathering in several areas could have equally provided clear and sufficient ideas about the genocide such as illicit arms flow, inside information on the genocide plots, the training and activities of the plotters and a long-standing pattern of ethnically-based human rights violations.

However, the United Nations did not analyse or synthesize these important pieces of the evidence on ground, nor did it proactively seek further information that could have corroborated and deepened the information at hand (Mangu, 2014). The United Nation also ignored a range of possible preventive measures, maybe due to the fact that it had no mandate or means and initiative to gather intelligence and to act on it.

Also since Western diplomats showed inadequate progressive commitment in the Arusha process with threats of withdrawal already in place, United Nation peacekeepers encouraged and initiated Hutu extremists because removal of UN peacekeepers facilitated the attainment of their goal: Western leaders and UN were detailed of concerns regarding political violence looming in Rwanda.

However, Rwanda currently has accomplished significant political, social and economic progress to prevent another atrocity like the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi and moderately on the Hutu. Barely twenty eight years after the genocide in 1994, Rwanda was listed as the ninth fastest growing economy in the world with a 7.8% projected Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2013 (The Economist, 2013), "... ranks 52 out of 185 on "ease of doing business" and 8% on "ease in starting a business"....

Through safety, security, zero-tolerance for corruption and a stated goal to eliminate foreign aid (currently about 40% of its budget), Rwanda has put itself on trajectory towards greater self-sufficiency" (David, 2016).

United Nations Involvement in Conflict Resolutions in Africa

The United Nations is an international organization with cooperative arrangement instituted among its member states, usually with advantages and functions which are implemented through periodic meetings and staff activities

(Palmer & Perkins, 1969:89). The name "United Nations" coined by United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt was first used in the declaration by United Nations of 1 January, 1942, during the 2nd world war when representatives of 26 nations pledged their governments to continue fighting together against the Axis Powers.

The forerunner of the United Nations was the League of Nations, an organization conceived in similar circumstances during the First World War and established in 1919 under the Treaty of Versailles "to promote international cooperation and to achieve peace and security: It officially came into existence on 24 October 1945, when its charter had been ratified by China, France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States of America and by a majority of other signatories.

The purposes, principles and organizations of the United Nations are outlined in the charter which established it. According to O'Sullivan and Christopher (2005:19), the United Nations is based on the sovereign equality of its member states whereby disputes are to be settled by peaceful means while member states are to refrain from the threat or use of force in contravention of the United Nations. Thus, member state must assist the organization in any enforcement activities it takes under the charter. Article 2 of the charter further stipulates a basic long-standing norm that the organization shall not intervene in matters considered within the domestic jurisdiction of any state.

According to its charter, the United Nations aims at saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war..., to affirm faith in fundamental human rights and ensure that humans enjoy what it means to be humans. In addition to maintaining peace and security, other important objectives include developing friendly relations among countries based on respect for the principles of equal rights and self-determination of peoples; achieving worldwide cooperation to solve international economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems; respecting and promoting human rights; and serving as a center where countries can coordinate their action and activities toward these various ends.

The United Nations was borne out of war, and so its founders were conscious of avoiding wars and protect individuals globally.

Its involvement or interventions in Africa include the following:

In Sierra Leone, a UN force facilitated transition to democratic leadership by a much improved security environment in 1999.

In Liberia the UN force was dispatched to help in implementing comprehensive peace agreement in 2003 (Thakur, 2006:47). In 1999, UN negotiated settlement which provided room for cease fire and referendum meant for people to chose between independence and integration with Morocco, but the referendum did not hold. In Sierra Leone, after the military coup of 1997 against President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, ECOWAS sent a monitoring group (ECOMOG) which received UN support. In Liberia, Charles Taylor former rebel leader, won elections held in 1997. The UN peace building support office in Liberia took charge and supported reconciliation, resettlement and reintegration programme. In Angola, after fifteen years of civil war between MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola), government in Luanda and UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) rebels of Jonas Savimbi, UN Angola Verification Mission (UNIVEM) was set up to ensure withdrawal of Cuban international troops from Angola and Implement peace plan agreed upon by warring parties in Lisbon; Portugal in 1997. The MPLA government won the 1992 elections which UNITA did not accept leading to another round of civil war in Angola.

Somalia in 1992, the "UN operation in Somalia" (UNOSOM) facilitated humanitarian help for people affected by war and famine. The persistent insecurity further led to setting up of US-led Unified Task Force (UNITF) to facilitate delivering of humanitarian help (Okere-meta, 2013: 48-49).

As for Rwanda, the United Nations Security Council set up UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) in 1993 to ensure national reconciliation, but the peace efforts were held in April, 6 1994 when the plane carrying President Juvenal Habyarimala of Rwanda and President Cyprien Ntaryemira of Burundi was shot down on its way to Kigali airport. This act of assassination triggered off the Rwanda genocide which saw over 500,000 Tutsis and some Hutus killed in barely one month. The genocide ended when Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) marched into Kigali and overthrew the government. The UNAMIR left Kigali in March 1996.

In Burundi, United Nations Office in Bujumbra (UNOB) was set up in November 1993 to hasten the restoration of constitutional rule while UN observer mission was positioned in May 1996 to advance human rights by gathering information on right violation.

The Rwanda Conflict Experience

The Rwanda conflict experience was a nightmare considering the number of casualties involved. The United Nations Refugee Agency reckoned that in one day alone in April, 1994 about 250,000 Rwanda fled into neighbouring Tanzania in the largest and fastest exodus it had ever seen. Indeed, in less than one month 250,000 Rwandans may have been killed, as reported by the Cable Network News in May, 1994. According to Allen, (2018:76), even if the figure is exaggerated, it is certain that more people had dwelt in Rwanda in the past month than Bosnia in the past two years. The deaths from an air crash explosion on April 6, 1994 of President Juvenal Habyarmana of Rwanda and Cyprian Ntaryamra of Burundi gave rise to the present anflagration in Central Africa. Their deaths have caused a tribal explosion of great dimension in their two countries (Rwanda and Burundi), but that of Rwanda which is our main focus in the study, is particularly galling, bad and beyond imagination.

The Rwanda conflict was typically ethnic based, characteristic of happenings in many third world countries. Ethnicity, therefore, overrides other variables in the conflict which the United Nations misconstrued at the onset that led to the escalation of the conflict. This made the task of the United Nations Peace Keepers more arduous.

The conflict was traceable to a combination of both economic and ethnic factors. This is because Rwanda has three ethnic groups – the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa.

The original inhabitants of Rwanda were the Twa (Pygmies) and constituted only one percent of the population. The Tutsi kept them as their servants and workers.

In the 14t century, the Hutu farmers, who constituted 80 percent of the population, belonging to the Bantu group, came to the country and impose their language and culture on the two groups. The Tutsi who constituted 19 percent of the population were politically dominant people over the two.

In 1923, the League of Nations formally gave Belgium the mandate over Rwanda and Burundi. In December 1946, the UN General Assembly recognized Rwanda and Burundi as Trustship states. When it became independent on July 1, 1962 the Tutsi continued to dominate the other ethnic groups and aligned with Belgium and France. The fact that Rwanda was heavily dependent on foreign aid and its former colonial masters deprived them of the much needed foreign exchange which caused poverty and the resultant underdevelopment.

The resultant internal problem in Rwanda gave rise to the peasant revolution which in turn gave rise to the refugee crisis and armed uprisings.

The African Union (AU) could not resolve the Rwanda conflict as a result of the widening split between the English and French speaking countries as to who should represent the war-torn country.

Consequently, the Rwanda conflict made some Hutus and Tutsis to settle in other Central Africa states, for example, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo and other neighbouring African countries. African Union had to evolve a regional mechanism for resolving the conflict in Rwanda and other neighbouring countries so as to prevent its spill over into other African countries, while the United Nations' role was aimed at ensuring that genocide did not repeat itself, despite the fact that there was early warning system to the United Nations.

An Appraisal of United Nations Peace Keeping in Rwanda

The charter of the UN provides for the maintenance of international peace and security which empowers the security council in chapter vi to call on warring parties to settle disputes by peaceful means and to recommend appropriate measures to be taken.

Unfortunately, the United Nations peace keeping efforts in Rwanda did not produce the desired result it was meant to produce. The strained relationship between the Hutu militias and the Tutsi dominated RPF which culminated to so many killings, forced the United Nations to station about 2,500 peace-keepers in Rwanda. The United Nations, hitherto, withdrew all the 2,500 peace-keepers soon after the death of the late President Juverial Habyarimana. And, the killings assumed a greater dimension. It was only on May 17, 1994 that United Nations Security Council decided to dispatch a few hundred peace-keepers back to Rwanda and also agreed in principles to dispatch a larger all African regional force to protect civilians, refugees and relief workers (the Economist, May 21, 1994:15).

The question, therefore is why should United Nations withdraw her troops in Rwanda knowing fully well that Rwanda has been one of Africa's flash points. The UN peace-keepers' withdrawal opened a floodgate of question on the role and nature of peace-keeping by the UN in Africa. Does African conflicts and the lives of Africans have any bearing on the UN Security Council? Why was the peace-keeping in Rwanda treated so casually?

The then United Nations Secretary-General, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali blamed the international community for the genocide in Rwanda. He agreed that United Nations policy in Rwanda had failed and that Africa especially had not done enough for the wartorn country. (Sunday Punch, May 20, 1994:21). Much as Dr. Boutros-Ghali's comment was seen as passing the buck, some African states notably Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania and Senegal sent troops to the United Nations peace-keeping in Rwanda. Other African countries equally followed suit, though not in very significant manner. If all these, African troops had combined efforts with other United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda, the damage done could have been averted.

Mechanisms of Conflict Resolution in Rwanda

Building sustainable peace in Rwanda requires the establishment of strategies that responds to two types of factors – viz:

1. The one that have impede peace to exist or have constantly weakened it, and
2. The one that could possibly nip peace in bud.

These strategies should be based on conflict resolution and emergence of citizenship, responsible and democratic governance and sustainable socio-economic development.

With regard to these aspects, the Rwanda population has generated a lot of opportunities which can be traced back to the government action and leadership as well as to the action and attitudes of the population itself. First and foremost, it is a matter of leadership and good governance.

After the 1994 genocide which stood out in Africa, Rwanda showed ingenuity in conflict management and resolution, via the policy of National Reconciliation as well as participatory and innovative justice known as Gacaca. Rwanda brought honour and pride to Africa when it was declared world number one of good governance for the year 2002, out of nearly half of the number of UN member countries. The same year the international leadership prize was awarded to Rwanda President and through him to the Rwandan leadership (Collier & Sambaris, 2012).

Building a nation is the emergence of three wills, underlying the natural foundation. One, is the individual will, the common will and the representative common will which is embodied by rulers. However, both wills have never been politically developed neither by colonial powers nor by their successors.

For the first time in the history of Rwanda, leaders were openly willing to re-build the Rwandan

nation and involved the population in that dynamic process. Such a dynamic made positive major changes in the Rwandan socio-political thinking (Hintjens, 1997).

Finally, there was the contribution of the Rwandan Defence Forces (RDF) to national security and stability as well as to the process of the national transformation for sustainable peace. RDF was a professional, strong and friendly towards the population which had good reasons to constantly rely on it (Mangu, 2004).

All those opportunities could be developed because the population favourably welcomed them at the onset. Among numerous positive attitudes, which are intrinsic to the Rwandan culture that contributed to the achievement of all of that, one could mention values such as endurance (Kwihangana), commitment (Kwitanga), perseverance (Kugira umihate) and voluntary participation (gukorera ubushake) (Orentlieher, 2007).

It is worth mentioning within the purview of this paper that the success of these mechanisms and tools for the conflict resolution and peace building was dependent on three major factors:- viz; Vision 2020, the New Constitution and the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (Mangu, 2004).

CONCLUSION

The genocide of 1994 in Rwanda which resulted to the death of approximately a million people was due to the failure on the part of the international community vis-à-vis the United Nations to intervene actively and properly on the crisis.

Although, failure to stop crisis falls not just on UN, but every member state of the international community which had the means and resources of doing so.

The long standing hostility between the Tutsi and the Hutu alone would not have ignited genocide, but for the persistence of a small group of persons with extremist ideology from Hutu segment of the society who masterminded the genocide. And, it was foreseen by the international community yet the UN failed to prevent it.

The mechanism of UN Security Council for conflict resolution needs serious evaluation if it is to conduct its grand objectives via its mandate of maintaining world peace and security.

Finally, the UN, through is not expected to do much more than the home country which holds the responsibility for reconstruction, rehabilitation, reconciliation and recovery, but it ought to play major role to ensure or prevent unstable regions globally from exploding into crisis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The UN should gear efforts towards the achievement of its objectives and manage towards maintaining world peace and the safeguard of humanity against genocide, terrorism and other related crimes.
2. Relevant information about events should be disseminated on time to prevent escalation of crisis.
3. Countries should enact legislations that would discourage and curtail the influence and spread of hate speech, cognizance of its devastating effects of breeding ethnic animosity and war.
4. State actors other than the UN should galvanize efforts to pursue global peace, human rights protection and safety of lives and property.
5. The UN should strive to impose embargo on disputing country so as to limit supply of arms to belligerents.
6. The international community should increase cooperation with all the countries' judicial system in the arrest and prosecution of those responsible for the promotion of genocide.

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