

DARFUR AND THE WEAKNESS OF UN PEACEKEEPING IN AFRICA

What shall we do tomorrow? What shall we ever do?

—T. S. ELIOT, "THE WASTE LAND"

The UN's greatest potential as the Cold War ended seemed to be in peacekeeping. Successes in Namibia, bringing it to full independence under majority rule, and Mozambique, helping to end a debilitating post-colonial civil war, were positive signs, marking the actual end of conflicts. Other operations failed. Somalia, for example, disintegrated into anarchy and became a base of operations for terrorists and pirates. Sub-Saharan Africa's first secretary general, Kofi Annan, placed considerable emphasis on Africa, but by the time of my arrival in New York, stasis had replaced success.

The concentration of the Security Council's work on Africa is staggering. In mid-2005, there were eight continuing African peacekeeping operations, out of a total of seventeen worldwide, plus three continuing "political" operations, and countless emissaries and temporary missions. By October 2006, shortly before I left New York, there were eighteen operations with 80,976 military and police personnel, and 15,000 civilians serving worldwide,¹ and the prospect of a further, substantial increase if the UN

1. "United Nations Military, Police Deployment Reaches All-Time High in October," press release PKO/152, November 10, 2006.

ever established a peacekeeping presence in the three Darfur provinces of Sudan. These last figures do not include the UN's political missions, which, depending on how one counted them, totaled approximately eighteen worldwide by the end of 2006.

In 2006, for example, the Council passed a total of 87 resolutions, of which 76 dealt with specific conflict situations. Of those, 46 addressed African conflicts, while only 30 dealt with conflicts elsewhere, meaning that African resolutions amounted to 60 percent of the total worldwide output. Similarly, there were 59 presidential statements in 2006, of which 48 addressed specific conflicts, and 29 of them, approximately 60 percent of the worldwide total, concerned Africa. As tragic and homicidal as Africa's conflicts have been, however, there is no serious argument that 60 percent of the aggregate threat to international peace and security is concentrated on that continent, not when compared to the global proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and international terrorism. The Council concentrates on Africa for a variety of reasons, and one could make the argument that this concentration was justified if problems in Africa were actually being solved. The unfortunate reality, however, is that the UN is both ineffective in Africa and inattentive (and often ineffective) to more pervasive problems elsewhere.

While UN peacekeeping efforts are complex and defy easy generalization, the concentration on Africa is no accident. Especially in his second term (2002–6), Annan pushed relentlessly to increase UN involvement there, including retaining a UN presence in countries after an operation was concluded. The UN Secretariat complicated matters further, with confused and overlapping mandates for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), rather than integrated political and military operations organized on geographical lines (as I proposed to incoming secretary general Ban Ki-moon in late 2006). Former European colonial powers are all too willing to lead a new interventionism in their former colonies, helpfully financed largely by others, to show their High Minded “concern,” and to maintain at least some of their past influence. As is too often the case in “humanitarian” affairs, actual performance is less central than demonstrating “compassion.” It has not been, and still is not, politically correct to ask if the UN is actually solving the problem at hand, prolonging it, or perhaps even exacerbating it. Africa needs a concept for “graduation” from peacekeeping operations, which

many African diplomats recognize, to reassert its abilities to resolve its own problems. This is politically difficult to advocate at the UN, less because of what it says about Africa than for what it says about the True Believers' view of the UN. Whether Annan's departure will make a difference on this score remains to be seen.

How and why the promise of UN peacekeeping was blunted in the post-Cold War era is beyond what I can treat here, but the African experience demonstrates many of the reasons for the continued failure. Those who know it best are Africans themselves, many of whom are in private despair over the UN's ineffectiveness and urged me on in my efforts to resolve the political disputes that had given rise to peacekeeping operations in the first place. They understood better than anyone else that the price of continued stasis was all too evident in the conflict regions' unattractiveness to international trade and investment, the risk of future political and military instability, and the individual fear and uncertainty felt by often-innocent peoples enmeshed in the conflicts. Unfortunately, however, in the UN culture, solving problems is less admired than avoiding responsibility or laying blame, a culture that exists in both the Secretariat and the Security Council. Indeed, the Council is as much or more at fault, having over the years abdicated much of its political and military authority and judgment to the Secretariat. The Council creates peacekeeping operations and then rolls over their mandates year after year, without exercising the leadership necessary to solve the basic conflicts, rather than simply to freeze them. I decided to try something different, but the battle against the prevailing status quo culture proved more difficult to overcome than even I had believed.

The main event—or better stated in the UN context, the missed opportunity for a main event—was Darfur. This region fell into crisis after extensive efforts, led by the Bush administration, to resolve Sudan's long-standing North-South civil war appeared to end successfully. Whether that settlement will hold remains unresolved, but even as its implementation got under way, tragedy had come to the fore in western Sudan. In 2003, government-backed Moslem militia forces known colloquially as "janjaweed" killed, raped, and displaced black Moslems, launching what Secretary Powell, on September 4, 2004, was the first to call "genocide."

Darfur was the worst example of the UN's inability to address critical problems in Africa, but there were enough others to form a pattern. Progress in ending these conflicts need not be impossible, but progress will

not occur, in my view, unless the Security Council and the Secretariat place a higher value on resolving problems rather than simply massaging them. The examples that follow are incomplete, given the magnitude of the UN's activity in Africa, but they are sufficient to demonstrate the problem.

Ethiopia-Eritrea

An early peacekeeping crisis in my tenure came on October 4, 2005, when the Security Council convened hastily at 5:00 P.M. to deal with Eritrea's order grounding helicopter flights over its territory by UNMEE, the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea. The flight ban would substantially impair UNMEE's ability to operate, since many of its observation posts were in remote locations in these Horn of Africa countries, and could only be reached in a timely way by air. Most admitted that Eritrea had acted out of frustration that Ethiopia had refused for over three years to comply with the December 2000 Algiers Agreement between them. That agreement was intended to settle the disputed boundary between the two countries created after Eritrea declared independence, providing for arbitration through a neutral Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC), the results of which both parties agreed to accept as binding. The Security Council first created UNMEE in Resolution 1312 to monitor a cease-fire between the two sides while they negotiated in Algiers, and then continued and enhanced it thereafter in Resolutions 1320 and 1430. By 2002, the EEBC had completed its work delimiting the boundary, which should then have been demarcated physically. Ethiopia, however, was dissatisfied with the outcome and simply refused to allow the EEBC's demarcation work to proceed, thus causing over three years of stalemate. The UN just watched.

Neither the Ethiopian nor the Eritrean government would win any popularity contests, and I certainly had no favorite, but it seemed to me Eritrea had a point: Ethiopia had agreed on a mechanism to resolve the border dispute in 2000 and was now welching on the deal. I thought the Security Council, after over three years of watching the grass grow, should now determine whether both parties were still prepared to adhere to their commitments. If so, then demarcation should proceed, or if not, it was time to terminate UNMEE, which was simply propping up Ethiopia's flat violation of its commitments. That, of course, was not the way Annan and the

Secretariat saw the situation. Neither did many Council members, who focused like laser beams on Eritrea's interference with UNMEE's operations rather than on the underlying dispute. Eritrea was unquestionably interfering improperly in UNMEE's operations, but as a way to get our collective attention in the only manner a small, impoverished country knew how, by biting the UN's ankles. So, instead of dealing with the real problem, Annan and the Secretariat wanted to bite Eritrea back, but only with words, of course.

I thought that instead of responding at the capillary level, we should use Eritrea's action, which I certainly did not defend, as a pivot point to raise the underlying issue to the Council's attention. Then, we could either move to resolve it or determine that the underlying reason for its creation, the agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea, no longer existed, at least *de facto*. In effect, UNMEE was now part of the problem, as Eritrea's manipulation of its operations demonstrated. I said in the Council consultations that UN peacekeeping operations should not have eternal life, and that addressing this issue should be a central element of "UN reform." This caused a lot of heavy breathing, but I was heartened that the SG's special representative for Ethiopia-Eritrea, Joseph Legwaila of Botswana, said, "I just hope people wake up and realize it is important we should deal with the [border] stalemate decisively to make sure it ends." Unfortunately, the Council continued to dither, fearful that if it actually tried to stand up to Eritrea, the whole of UNMEE might be shut down. At one point I had a USUN staffer say at a Council experts' meeting that the headline so far was "Eritrea Faces Down Security Council." Characteristically, British deputy perm rep Adam Thomson responded protectively that such a statement was "wounding" to the Council, as indeed true statements often are.

To be sure, the reaction of the State Department's Africa bureau (AF) was initially not much better. AF had slumbered for three years right along with the Security Council, having endless meetings with Ethiopia and Eritrea but making no progress. The thought of terminating UNMEE was as heretical to AF as it was to other governments, since UNMEE's existence enabled them to say that *someone* was addressing the problem, even if ineffectively, thus laying off responsibility elsewhere. In fact, AF's attitude was highly typical of State's bureaucracy, which usually considered its own country or regional issues more important than larger policy questions such as UN reform or WMD proliferation. UNMEE, like many other UN

operations, was a substitute for real action, a crutch, and my talk of kicking away the crutch was not greeted enthusiastically at first. Unexpectedly, however, AF's assistant secretary, Jendayi Frazer, endorsed my view that we should use the crisis precipitated by Eritrea to try to resolve the border dispute and not simply let it fester forever. Unfortunately, things moved slowly. Only on November 23 did the Security Council adopt Resolution 1640, which demanded that Ethiopia accept the boundary commission's decisions as binding and allow it to demarcate the border.

Nothing happened. Accordingly, and predictably, Eritrea decided to bite another ankle, demanding that UNMEE expel all U.S., Canadian, European, and Russian military observers, another affront to the UN's sensibilities. To me, this was simply further proof that UNMEE was now part of the problem, a pawn in the Ethiopia-Eritrea dispute, not an effective tool in resolving that dispute. Still lost in the capillaries, however, Annan again vented against Eritrea. As before, I wasn't defending Eritrea, whose singling out of countries it thought partial to Ethiopia was hardly winning it friends, but the myopia of the Secretariat's response was just as troubling. If Eritrea was effectively withdrawing its consent to the peacekeeping operation, it was entitled to do so, especially since Ethiopia had already effectively withdrawn its consent for three years by obdurately refusing to comply with its freely undertaken obligation on border demarcation. Instead, Annan proposed that UNMEE operate only on the Ethiopian side of the border, which would have effectively rewarded Ethiopia's three years of intransigence by implicitly placing all of the responsibility for the current flap on Eritrea. Moreover, the idea that UNMEE in its present parlous condition was a deterrent to either Ethiopia's or Eritrea's resorting to force, if they deemed it in their interest to do so, was obviously misplaced. Despite grim Secretariat predictions about hostilities being imminent, none occurred. By now, France, Japan, and several other Council members had begun to agree with my point that whatever redeployment we might consider for UNMEE, it had to be decided in the context of the overall boundary dispute, and whether UNMEE still had a long-term role.

By mid-December, DPKO's military professionals leaned toward withdrawing UNMEE entirely, but Annan, viewing this as a personal defeat for his vision of ever-greater UN peacekeeping operations, especially in Africa, tried to stop them from pursuing their logic. At a December 21 Council meeting, I stressed that Eritrea had effectively withdrawn its consent for

UNMEE to operate, meaning that a fundamental prerequisite for UNMEE's deployment had ended, and that we had to consider complete withdrawal, perhaps after thirty days' notice to both sides to see if they came to their senses. De La Sablière immediately agreed with my analysis, and, as I had, rejected the idea that UNMEE's continued presence somehow amounted to a "preventive deployment" that would deter hostilities. Most other Council members also moved very close to my position, leaving only Jones Parry defending Annan's view. No one seemed to understand the collateral point that neither Ethiopia nor Eritrea was likely to get serious about listening to the UN, after close to five years of taking it for granted, until they realized that the UN might actually be about to depart.

Events took yet another turn in early January 2006, when AF's Frazer decided to make a major effort to push Eritrea and Ethiopia to demarcate the border. To give her some operating space, she asked that we basically freeze UNMEE in place for thirty days. She also said she would have agreed to terminate UNMEE long before had Burns not insisted we maintain it. I knew where that came from: Malloch Brown, on Annan's behalf, fearing another UN "failure," had gotten to Burns on an issue with which Burns had little involvement and no knowledge. Frazer fully understood that if the countries themselves were not prepared to implement their own agreement, UNMEE had no role to play. I explained Frazer's proposal to the Security Council on January 9, saying that she didn't plan to "solve" the problem, but to implement the solution Ethiopia and Eritrea themselves had previously agreed upon, namely implementing the 2002 boundary commission decision. I stressed we didn't expect this initiative to last forever; we would insist on progress from the parties, or we would terminate it. In the meantime, we should leave UNMEE's status unchanged for thirty days, at the end of which I would report again to the Council where things stood, and we could decide how to proceed. Since no one else had the slightest idea what to do, the "U.S. initiative" was easily endorsed. No one backed Annan's December options for UNMEE's redeployment, which was important, so Frazer's effort would not be undercut before it even started.

For reasons I never understood, however, Frazer reversed course, and asked in early February to reopen the 2002 EEBC decision, which she had concluded was wrong, and award a major piece of disputed territory to Ethiopia. I was at a loss how to explain that to the Security Council, so I

didn't, simply asking in February for another thirty-day extension of the UNMEE status quo while the "U.S. initiative" continued. No one had anything to say, and certainly no one had any other ideas, so it was agreed. There followed a number of fruitless EEBC meetings and short-term extensions of UNMEE. One EEBC meeting, in London, consisted largely of Ethiopia's American lawyer talking to Eritrea's American lawyer, which even most Council members recognized was a charade. Still, the Council took heart that "at least they agreed to meet again," a refrain I heard countless times at the UN from diplomats looking for any "progress" so we could uphold our motto, "We never fail in New York." On May 31, I finally pushed through a reduction in UNMEE force levels from 3,400 to 2,300, over fierce resistance from Jones Parry, despite what staffers in his own mission told us were clear instructions from London to support our preferred level of 1,500, and even though the UNMEE force commander agreed he would not be impaired at all even by a reduction to 1,800. While this force-sizing issue was hardly earth-shattering, it exemplified the rocklike opposition at the UN to acknowledging any problems with UN operations, or any questioning of the absolute centrality of a UN role.

Still, nothing happened with the "U.S. initiative," nothing happened on the ground between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and nothing much happened in the Security Council. On September 26, 2006, as we considered the latest proposals for a short-term extension of UNMEE's mandate, I said that our meetings had become yet another UN version of the movie *Groundhog Day*. Even Annan's latest report finally described the situation as "untenable." Nonetheless, as I left the UN, the "*Groundhog Day*" approach prevailed, and the Ethiopia-Eritrea border dispute was no closer to resolution than it had been since 2002.

Sudan

My first contact with Sudan came while I was still undersecretary, and involved the EU's pursuing its long-term objectives by confronting the United States with a lose-lose proposition, which we promptly lost. The EU has little or no capacity to project strategic strength, but when following its own theology, it is as committed to the faith as the people who built the cathedrals and churches all over Europe, which few of their descen-