

The Achievements of Ethiopia's Peacekeeping Operations in the North-South Sudan Conflict: Abyei Since 2011

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges of Ethiopia's peacekeeping operations in north-south Sudan conflict in the case of Abyei since 2011 in the maintenance of peace and security in the region. The study followed a qualitative methodological approach that deemed necessary for this kind of research which deals with underlying issues that are usually cannot be understood in a quantifiable manner. The data collection process depended up on secondary data. Findings of the study show that the Ethiopia's peacekeeping troops which is called United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) has played indispensable role in maintaining peace and security in the region. It has established by United Nations (UN) and overseen by African Union (AU) as regional peacekeeping force for peace support missions. The study identifies the following major achievements that have accomplished by UNISFA. These include protection of civilians, promoting stability in the region and resettlement of the displaced people to their home. For more successful future peacekeeping operation of the force and the sustainable peace of the Abyei region, however, the study suggests that the Ethiopian peacekeeping troops are expected to stay in the area and observe the security conditions in Abyei until a referendum to determine the region's future status is held, Ethiopia will need to recognize existing situation for regional organizations and initiate them on how to best develop effective cooperation so as to determine the peace and stability of the region, consolidate stable governance in both countries. Moreover, Africa's security actors, such as the UN, EU, USA and coordinated international assistance need to involve jointly to strengthening Ethiopian peace keeping operation in Abyei region.

Introduction

Africa has been ravaged with violence since the 1950s when African countries began fighting their colonial powers to gain independence. As a result, most African countries suffered from civil war and interstate conflict for over half a century (Ohaegbulam, 2004).

Historically, the conflict in north and south Sudan evolved from a rebellion marked by post-colonial characteristics to a new kind of war in which the control of natural resources plays a significant role (Aleksi, 2005). Both countries are fighting for the control of these areas due to the amount of oil, mineral, and arable land resources they hold (USIP, 2010). The war was one of the longest-running conflicts in Africa. It started in 1954, two years before Sudan gained independence from Britain and Egypt in 1956, as the South's disgruntlement with the Northern-dominated government grew and eventually developed into a full-blown campaign of guerrilla warfare across much of southern Sudan (Marsden, 2011)

According to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, Abyei was supposed to conduct a referendum alongside South Sudan's 2011 secession vote (ISS, 2015). The Abyei Area is an oil-rich region crisscrossing the borders of Sudan and South Sudan and is seen as a historical bridge between the two countries (World Council of Churches, 2013). In January, 2011, while Southern Sudan voted overwhelmingly for secession, the people of the Abyei region did not get to vote on their own referendum which, as part of the CPA, was scheduled on the same day. As the government and the SPLA were not able to agree on who was eligible to vote, the Abyei-referendum never took place and it resulted in major unrest in the area (Doop, 2013). And, thus always been seen as the most dangerous flashpoint for large-scale violence between north and south (Williams, 2011).

In this regard, AU and other international community urged the two governments to negotiate over the implementation of a number of Sudan-South Sudan agreements. AU efforts to resolve the Abyei issue are channelled through the AU High Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) on Sudan and South Sudan. The panel is mandated with initiating and facilitating talks on issues surrounding South Sudan's independence and disputes over the contested border, oil, security, citizenship and assets. However, AU efforts to mediate directly between Khartoum and the SPLM-N have been unsuccessful to date (ISS, 2015). Ethiopia as a member of UN, AU and IGAD continues playing a leading role to find a political solution to the horn of Africa particularly in North-South Sudan conflict in the case of Abyei (Kidist, 2014). Therefore, what Ethiopia's peace keeping force has been doing in this regard is the concern of this study, notably the successes it achieved as the troop contributor country of UN. The available literature focuses on Ethiopian negotiations and political skills past and present practices in dealing with north-south Sudan peace and stability. However, there is no comprehensive study, which addresses the achievements of Ethiopian peacekeeping mission in maintaining peace and security in the Abyei region specifically. Therefore, this study concerned with the examination of Ethiopian involvement in peace keeping operation of North-South Sudan conflict since the violence is erupted

in Abyei in May 2011 after the independence of South Sudan in July 2011 and assesses the achievements that faced Ethiopia in North- South Sudan peace keeping operations, which have been overlooked by the available literature, thereby contributing to the literature in the field. Accordingly, this research was conducted to answer the following basic research questions:

- What was Ethiopia's role in north-south Sudan, Abyei peace keeping operation?
- What were the rationales behind Ethiopian involvement in peace keeping operation in Abyei?
- What were the achievements of Ethiopia in peace keeping operations in Abyei?

In this research, with the intention to assess the achievements of Ethiopia's peacekeeping operations in the north-south Sudan conflict in the case of Abyei since 2011, the result of the study is significant for different researchers, analysts, and policy makers in formulating a framework of successful future peacekeeping and technique of peace keeping operation. Furthermore; it is hoped that this findings could stimulate further research in the field of peacekeeping operations.

Materials and Methods

The descriptive survey research design was employed in the study and the qualitative method was used whose data collection and analysis techniques involve describing and contextualizing the problem in view of the study. This research methodology is employed to describe a set of non-statistical inquiry techniques. Therefore, qualitative approach was selected as pertinent in order to grasp a detailed understanding of in order to explain Ethiopia's role in peace keeping operations in Abyei and achievements that viewed after peace keeping operations. For data collection, this study was relied on secondary data sources like books, media publications, scholars' articles. Therefore; this study was relied on the appropriate secondary sources and official documents to elicit pertinent information. As a method of analysis, the data which was collected from the above sources was utilized by using descriptive analysis in order to explain the theme of the study and to make a valid conclusion.

Results and Discussion

In this research attempt was made to assess the achievements of Ethiopia in Peacekeeping Operation in Abyei since 2011. Accordingly, the study revealed the following results. Like regional and sub regional efforts, African states have continued to intervene militarily on the continent, such interventions highlight the growing political willingness of African countries to undertake peacekeeping operations (Berman and Sams, 2000). Ethiopia firmly believes that its peace and security is the peace and security of its neighbours, and vice versa. In its sub-region, the deployment of Ethiopian troops in Darfur, Somalia and Abyei has made a significant contribution for the maintenance of regional peace, security and stability (Chatham House, 2015).

On June 27, 2011, the UN Security Council voted unanimously to establish the UN Interim Security Force in Abyei (UNISFA), a peacekeeping mission for the Abyei region on the border of Sudan and South Sudan. It was facilitated by former South African President Thabo Mbeki, chief of the AU-High-level Implementation Panel (HIP), the Addis Ababa Agreement on Abyei was signed by the SPLM forces and the Government of Sudan (GoS) on 20 June, 2011 (UN, 2014). Ethiopia's contribution to easing tensions between the two Sudanese is viewed as a very positive development. Nonetheless, both parties are still unable to agree on the issue of Abyei, and the disputed borders are not yet demarcated (Kidist, 2014).

Indeed, Ethiopia has its own agenda in dealing with both Sudan and South Sudan, but it acts through formal and institutionalized channels and in cooperation with the international partners, which has helped it to earn international recognition (ibid).

The Horn of Africa constitutes a Regional Security Complex in which the security problems of each country impacts on the security of all. This indicates that interactions between the states of the region support and sustain the conflicts within the states of the region in a systemic way (Healy, 2008). Security rationales are a major factor in Ethiopia's peacekeeping deployments. Both in policy and praxis, Ethiopia understands from experience that its national security is intertwined with the security of its neighbors and the countries of the region. Given that Ethiopia is the only country that shares borders with all the IGAD member states except Uganda, conflicts and security problems in its neighborhood often have serious repercussions for Ethiopia at home (Solomon, 2013). Moreover, Ethiopia is the only state in the Horn of Africa that shares borders with both Sudan and South Sudan and there are ethnic groups that live on both sides of their common borders. Accordingly, conflict between and within the two Sudans could have both a direct and indirect spill over effect on Ethiopia, thus Ethiopia can be seen to have a genuine interest in peace in and between the two countries (Kidist, 2014). This has been the major factor behind Ethiopia's deployment to Sudan's Abyei region (Solomon, 2013). Moreover, Ethiopia as a leading player in the Horn of Africa and Chair of the IGAD, took the initiative and diplomatic burden to deploy its troops to the South and North Sudan disputed region which is called Abyei.

1. Protection of civilians

'Protection of civilians' is a broad term for which there is no common definition among military, peacekeeping or humanitarian actors. However, there are parallels in their respective understandings of the concept; it is

generally accepted that protecting civilians in armed conflict and other situations of violence relates to violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, and is not limited to mere physical security but rather encompasses ‘the broader spectrum of human security and human dignity’ (HPG and ICRC, 2011). UNISFA, which is mandated with protecting civilians, monitoring the flashpoint border area and facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid, is an all-Ethiopian force (ISS, 2015). Acting under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, the UNSC authorized UNISFA, within its capabilities and its area of deployment, to take the necessary actions to protect civilians in the Abyei area who are under imminent threat of physical violence. The resolution further charged the interim force with facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid and the free movement of relief workers in and around Abyei (Elron, 2011). UNISFA’s deep engagement at the community level has effectively facilitated and controlled the movements of Misseriya nomads through Abyei and into neighboring states during the dry season, thus minimizing interaction and tensions between the Misseriya nomads and returning NgokDinka (Hsiao, 2012). Therefore, by protecting civilians, securing access for humanitarian assistance, mediating migration-based conflicts, and facilitating the return of the displaced, UNISFA has worked tirelessly to promote the wellbeing of those affected by the conflict. This work is motivated by a sense of value and dignity for people (UN, 2014).

2 Promotes stability in the region.

A key achievement in international efforts to bring Abyei back from the brink is the deployment of the nearly 4,000-strong UNISFA peacekeeping mission which has kept the Abyei area stable during the traditionally volatile migration season and in spite of larger North-South tensions that threatened to spill into the area. In recognition of the complicated web of stakeholders whose buy-in is necessary for securing peace in Abyei, the UNISFA leadership has heavily engaged with authorities at all levels, from local traditional authorities to leaders in Juba and Khartoum, to ensure unauthorized forces outside of Abyei do not enter the area, and to maintain peace as Misseriya nomads migrate and the NgokDinka population slowly returns (Hsiao, 2012).

Consequently, the security situation in the Abyei Area remains highly unpredictable and tense. This coupled with the instability of the surrounding areas – including Central African Republic, Darfur, and South Sudan – renders the work of UNISFA absolutely necessary for the benefit of both the region (UN, 2014). Therefore, Ethiopian troops in Abyei are said to be remarkably efficient and have managed to maintain security in the area.

3. Contributed for the returning of the displaced people to their home.

In late May 2011, Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) soldiers forcibly occupied Abyei town, destroying much of its infrastructure and looting various supplies in the process. They also blocked the return of many thousands of the people displaced by their acts of aggression, including through the use of land mines and the destruction of important infrastructure (Williams, 2011).

With the withdrawal of Sudanese government forces from Abyei town in early June 2011, large-scale returns of the estimated 110,000 mostly NgokDinka displaced population and the reconstruction of Abyei can finally begin. The full deployment of an Ethiopian U.N. peacekeeping mission that has managed to maintain stability in the Abyei area despite local and national-level tensions is one of the successes that achieved by Ethiopian peace keepers in Abyei (Hsiao, 2012).

Conclusions

As a result of the continuous conflict, enormous change has taken place in Sudan in 2011, and the consequences for regional stability and the implications for peace operations are not yet fully clear. Ongoing political processes and negotiations are certain to impact and make further demands upon UN operations. Since February 2011, Abyei oil rich disputed border areas of South Sudan and Sudan, witnessed an intensive military clash between the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) forces and the military of the Government of Sudan (GoS). Abyei has thus always been seen as the most dangerous flashpoint for large-scale violence between north and south.

In response to this problem UN has authorized an Ethiopian Peacekeeping troop which is called UNISFA. Ethiopian peacekeeping mission provides an important and widening window of opportunity for the security issues of the North and South Sudan in the case of Abyei. For Ethiopia, it offers several strategic benefits, as Ethiopia’s international profile and its influence in the UN shows. Ethiopia’s peace keeping forces has played indispensable role in the maintenance of stability in the region by preventing the tense border zone between North and South Sudan and protect civilians and humanitarian workers in the Abyei area by communicating with local peoples. In line to this UNISFA implementing a multifaceted conflict prevention and mitigation strategy to prevent and resolve clashes between ethnic groups. Ethiopia has become far more engaged in UN peacekeeping operations open up new avenues to strengthen the current peace, security, the stability and long-term development goals of conflict-affected areas. This stable region helps the displaced people to return back to their home, and to promote the protection of civilians.

Accordingly, it would be logical to recommend that the Ethiopian peacekeeping troops are expected to

stay in the area and observe the security conditions in Abyei until a referendum to determine the region's future status is held and Ethiopia will continue to play a major role in PKOs mission for the maintenance of regional peace and security by assessing the effectiveness of peace keepers in the region. Moreover, Ethiopia will need to recognize what it should retain ,what it should pass on to regional organizations and arrangements when practicable, and how to best develop effective cooperation to make the most effective operationalization of the mission. This leads the active involvement of regional organization to support Ethiopian peace keeping mission in the region.

The government of north and south Sudan should be consolidate stable governance. This must include democratic governance reform and institutional checks and balances to help the smooth cooperation between the north and south governments. This strengthens the trust between them and solves their differences peacefully. Additionally it helps Ethiopia, North and south Sudan to tackle the destructive role of insurgent groups in the Horn of Africa. Furthermore, to create a conducive environment for the conflicting parties to solve their differences peacefully and to ensure the implementation of lasting peace agreements, it needs the active involvement of Africa's security actors, such as the UN, EU, USA and other major powers.

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