

The United Nations and Conflict Resolution in Central African Republic: An Appraisal

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Abstract

After seventy-two years of the existence of the United Nations Organization (UNO), scholars and laymen alike expect the organization to have been performing more than when it was institutionalized in terms of managing violent conflicts. With the start of the Central African Republic (CAR) civil war in 2013, the demand for the UN to help mitigate conflicts in the world and the CAR civil war, in particular, became even more urgent especially as there were frightening reports of killings, rape, lootings orchestrated by the war situation. This study which is anchored on the structural-functional theoretical direction carried out a qualitative research which gathered data exclusively from secondary sources. The objective of the study is to investigate how the United Nations managed the violent conflict in CAR and how the peacekeeping force was able or unable to guarantee peace and stability in the country. The study revealed that instead of ushering in peace and stability, the UN via their peacekeeping troops and police were raping the people and taking sides with one of the warring groups. In most cases, the "Blue Helmets" could not protect the civilian population particularly women and children. The study recommended that for the CAR conflict to stop the entire population wants to see justice in all spheres of life, perpetrators of crimes against the people including foreign soldiers and police must be arrested and jailed.

Keyword: Central African Republic, Conflict, Conflict resolution and United Nations.

Introduction

Conflict is a social problem that has been with man from time immemorial. It is an inevitable part of life common in any part of the world, be it in the developed or developing countries. No wonder Gilbert (2014) notes that conflict is a universal phenomenon and it is not limited to any part of the global system. The conflict in the Central African Republic which precipitated the use of United Nations peacekeeping force in the country is no exception. However, the rate at which conflict occurs and the effect which violent conflict may exert in one country may differ from another. Conflict arises in societies due to contending opinions, divergent wants, competing for needs and opposing interests. Conflict can be classified into intra-personal, interpersonal, inter-group and global conflicts. Intergroup conflict in the form of ethnic, religious and political clashes which sometimes lead to armed conflict in the form of war are rampant in Africa before and after the early independence era in the 1950s and early 1960s (Oguonu and Ezeibe, 2014). Conflict is one of the worst catastrophes that have beset Africa because it serves as major causes of poverty, hunger, and unemployment, which have multiplied in Africa during and after the departure of our colonial masters. With cases of constant conflict across the region, there has been a strong need for resolving existing conflicts and preventing future occurrences in Africa.

The United Nations is the major body established to resolve conflicts among nations and between groups within a particular country across the world. Article 12, of the United Nations Charter, posits that the General Assembly may suggest actions for the peaceful resolution of any conflict, regardless of the origin, which is likely to adversely affect the general welfare or friendly relations among nations. Consequently, it is the duty of the United Nations (UN) to resolve seemingly intractable armed conflicts within states in general and the Central African Republic in particular, as well as to ensure that the political and territorial integrity of every

country is maintained. In the same line, regional bodies such as and European Union (EU) have roles to play in resolving conflict at the regional level. However, regional bodies like AU lack the capacity and the resources for successful peacekeeping interventions and resolution leaving United Nations (UN) as the only hope for peace and conflict resolution across Africa and the rest of the world. The question here is does the United Nations live to the above expectation in Africa especially in countries like the Central African Republic (CAR)?

The Central African Republic is one of Africa's poorest states and the country's peace has been fragile. Ever since its independence from France in 1960, it is yet to experience a peaceful decade. The foundation of what led to the conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR) was laid right from the period when Jean-Bedel Bokassa declared himself the Emperor of CAR and overthrew President David Dacko. Since that period, all Presidents who came up were characterized by corruption, nepotism and they favored a selected few who were members of their ethnic group or immediate family members. However, the recent conflict in CAR began in December 2012 when Seleka a coalition of armed, mainly Muslim group launched an attack against the government of CAR due to political, economic and religious discontentment leading to the overthrow of the former president François Bozizé on 23 March 2013 (Global Conflict Tracker, 2018). Following the March 2013 uprising that removed Bozizé from power, Michel Djotodia became the president. Since then, there has a severe decline in the country's security, infrastructure and heightened ethnic tensions mostly in Bangui and the north-eastern regions. Reacting to the violence by Seleka forces, "anti-balaka" coalition of Christian fighters formed to carry out reprisal violence against Seleka fighters, adding a religious element to the violence that had previously been absent. In September 2013, anti-balaka forces began committing widespread revenge attacks against mostly Muslims civilians, displacing tens of thousands of people to Seleka-controlled areas in the north. Seleka forces were disbanded by the government shortly after revenge attacks began, but many ex-Seleka members started committing counterattacks, plunging CAR into a chaotic state of violence and resulting in a humanitarian crisis (Global Conflict Tracker, 2018).

On 23 January 2014, a transitional government was set up and Catherine Samba-Panza was declared the head of state of the transition. She served in this position until February 2016 when an election was conducted which brought President Faustin-Archange Touadéra into power. (Tunda, 2017). Seeing the catastrophic nature of war in the Central African Republic (CAR), the international community mobilized a UN peacekeeping mission to resolve the conflict. However, the situation remains volatile rising questions to the viability of the United Nations (UN) to resolve conflicts in Africa.

Consequently, this study seeks to critically examine the role the United Nations (UN) played in managing and resolving the conflict in the Central Africa Republic (CAR) and also give recommendations to help solve the problem. While the paper adopted a qualitative method to analyze secondary data obtained from relevant journal publications, internet sources, seminar papers, books, reports from international organizations and the media regarding conflicts in CAR. This approach is considered more appropriate here because it affords the researcher the opportunity to observe a plethora of views from individuals, groups, and institutions regarding the conflict in a more objective manner.

Conceptual Clarification

Conflict is a very fluid concept. This is because the term has attracted several explanations by different scholars. Conflict can mean many different things to different people and range in intensity from a minor difference of opinion to war between groups. According to Kurt Lewin cited in Gody (2012, p. 24), conflict is a "situation of tension which was caused by a number of factors including the degree to which the needs of a person were in a state of hunger or satisfaction". In the same line of thought, Stagner also cited in **Onumajuru (2005)** sees conflict as a situation in which two or more human beings yearn possessions which they perceive as being accessible by one or the other, but not both and each party recognizes the other as an obstacle or danger to that goal. Hence, mobilizes resources and energy to pursue such a goal.

For Lewis A. Coser (1964:123) **conflict is simply**, a "struggle over values and claims to scarce, status, power, and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals". The conflict

for Wallensteen (2002:98), is "a social situation in which a minimum of two actors (parties) strive to the same moment in time an available set of scarce resources". This definition of conflict here focuses on the availability of scarce resources. However, one can ask whether all conflicts are about resources. In addition, there are some conflicts that are about ideology, cultural differences, and religious differences and so on. These are not related to resources, because the presence of conflict over resources the time requires the existence of tangible goods such as money. But that does not totally mean resources equal materials. It may also serve, for example, the exclusion of a group of people from public services based on their ethnicity, religion or region. Such a situation can bring awareness and the possibility of having conflict in such a country is high. One of the major causes of the conflict in CAR was as a result of the above explanation. To some point, each definition of the concept conflict provides different insight but there seems to be a general idea in all these definitions. The common idea which can be deduced from the various definitions is that conflict has to do with two or more parties, there is the existence of disagreement or incompatibility and it often causes tension and may lead to loss of lives.

It is important at this point to note that conflict is in different typologies and that conflict might not necessarily be seen as violence or war until it involves the use of arms and causes injuries and destructions of properties. In this study, conflict is seen as a violent opposition between two factions in CAR predominantly Christians and Muslims which have polarized the country along religious lines and led to the death of many and displaced thousands.

Conflict Resolution

The impact of all conflict on citizens and the socioeconomic well-being of the nations involved alarming. Hence, whenever conflict occurs within a country, there need to bring it to an end is the concern of the international community and citizens. The desire to manage conflict makes the concept of conflict resolution common today. According to McLean and McMillia (2003:107), conflict resolution refers to the methods and procedures of negotiation, adjudication, and institution building which fosters the peaceful ending of social conflict and war. The term conflict resolution simply means a range of techniques employed to lessen or eliminate sources of conflict. According to Kriesberg (2002), conflict resolution as to find problems that led to conflicts, in other words, it deals with deep-rooted human needs. Kreisberg added that experts of conflict resolution have a different opinion regarding coercive and violent means to resolve conflict, thus some experts say that using coercion is sharply contrasting to the idea of resolving the conflict.

In a nutshell, the aim of conflict resolution is not to overcome conflict, because conflicts cannot be overcome. It is an unavoidable feature of social development; and when attempting to combat an unjust situation, more conflict may arise before a resolution can be achieved. Therefore, organizations or individuals involved in conflict resolution must transform actual or potential violent conflicts into non-violent forms of social struggle and social change.

Literature Review

As part of its statutory functions, the UN has engaged in several conflict resolution processes especially in Africa where conflict has been rampant. Over the years, scholars have examined the performances of UN in managing conflict in different parts of Africa. **Onumajuru (2005) studied United Nations Peacekeeping Operation and Conflict Resolution in AFRICA.**

The paper used interview and documentary methods. The study discovered that the mainstream of conflict in Africa is internal. The main sources of conflicts in Africa were identified as poor economic performance, societal inequality, and political segregation as well as aggravating factors such as ethnicity and substandard nature of interstate borders inherited from colonial times. Additionally, the study revealed that the UN as an organization saddled with the responsibility to resolve conflict has not been very effective in Africa. This is as a result of the various discrepancies of the UN mission in Africa, which includes poor logistics, imprecise mandate, delay in intervention, poor attitude of the west to conflicts in Africa among others.

In another study, Mbongeh and Thiessen (2017) **appraised the role of women in CAR's conflict resolution and peace-building processes. They argued that over the last few years, women and girls have incurred the greatest casualties during armed conflicts. As a result of this, concerted efforts and extensive lobbying**

by international NGOs and women activists urged the UN Security Council to adopt Resolution 1325 (SCR 1325). The adoption of this resolution in October 2000 served as the first international legal document that specifically focused on safeguarding women and girls from violence during and after armed conflicts. They found that though the resolution called for the safety of women during and after conflicts and support their participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict peacebuilding, it is imperative to state that, very few countries, especially in the Sub-Sahara African region, have succeeded in translating the message of the resolution from word to practice. The paper, therefore, concludes by developing recommendations on how women activists in the CAR can be fully engaged in the country's public decision-making and peacebuilding activities. The study gives us insight to conflict in CAR and role the UN through UN SCR 1325 can play to protect women and Children, it has not explained what role UN had played so far in conflict resolution in CAR.

In their work, Carayannis and Fowlis (2017) analyse the responses and relationship between international and regional bodies like UN in CAR conflicts. It is argued that peace operations in CAR have lacked a clear political strategy and a clear understanding of the situation, as well as the necessary sustained engagement from both regional and international actors. It is further argued that each subsequent intervention has added an additional layer to the previous one, thus creating a proliferation of peace operations whose mandates, troop contingents and leadership have not always been fit for purpose.

Despite the proliferation of academic writings and research conducted on the issue of conflicts in African continents, recent studies have shown that very little scholarly works have been documented on the role of UN in conflict resolution in CAR. This indicates the existence of a gap in the body of knowledge in the area of peace and conflict studies, international studies and political science among others. This paper attempts to contribute towards filling this gap seeing that peace is a panacea for socio-economic growth of any society yet it keeps eluding African continent.

Theoretical Framework

This study is premised on the structural-functional theory an analysis propounded by Almond and Coleman (1960) and Almond and Powell, (1966). The Structural-Functional analysis first experimented in the biological and mechanical sciences as part of system analysis. It was adopted as a model of analysis in sociology and Anthropology. Gabriel Almond developed it for political analysis. Almond (1966), explained that based on structural-functionalism, every political system performs certain functions. He adopted Easton's systems analysis and stressed the functions which could be included among the input and output functions of all political systems (Ofodile, 2011). The basic assumption of the structural-functional framework is that all systems have structures, which can be identified, and those structures perform a specific set of tasks if they are to remain in existence and maintain their relevance to the system (Ofodile, 2011).

Structural-functionalism is anchored on two basic concepts: structures and functions. While structures are arrangements within the system which performs the functions which could either be diffused or diffracted, functions are the springing from the workings of the system or what the system does.

Applying the structural-functional theory to this study, the UN is a system which is responsible for the security of lives and promotion of peace, however, to ensure this there are structures in the UN that ensure this responsibility is met. One of these structures is the UN peacekeeping troops. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) is one of the units within the United Nations which can also be seen as a structure that makes up the whole system which is the United Nations. The MINUSCA, being a peacekeeping force, now functions to maintain peace in the Central African Republic. For the system to function effectively the structure must perform its duties. To understand the role of the United Nations in managing the violent conflict in the Central African Republic the activities of the UN peacekeeping troops will be analyzed. This is due to the fact that the actions or inactions, success or failure of the peacekeeping force in CAR which is the structure determines the effectiveness of the entire system that is the United Nations. The theory is considered relevant to this study because it will assist the researcher to analyses the UN in an attempt to manage the conflict in CAR

and how effective it was in performing its duties through its peacekeepers. Having this understanding will help UN to improve effective peacekeeping which will ensure peace in the world.

United Nations and Conflict Resolution in the Central African Republic (CAR)

CAR is one of Africa's poorest states and the country's peace has been fragile. Since its independence from France in 1960, it is yet to experience a peaceful decade. The major crisis broke out in 2003 and intensified particularly from 2012 down 2014/2015 because of political, economic and religious discontentment among citizens of CAR since independence leading to the formation of various groups including rebel groups. In March 2013, Selekaa coalition of rebel groups seized power from President Francois Bozize, sparking violent instability in CAR. They accused President Bozize of failing to abide by peace agreements he had signed with them in 2007 and 2011. Michel Djotodia then declared himself president, however human rights violations continued in the country (**Amnesty International, 2014**).

Seleka's rule under was ephemeral due to distrust among various leaders of rebel groups and the continuous looting and arrest of political opponents among other abuses. The cruelty of the Seleka rebel group led to the creation of another group of rebels called the 'anti-balaka' which was formed in the west of the country and on 5th December 2013 attacked Bangui (Tunda, 2017). Since 2013, various troops have been sent in to try and manage the situation. For years with serious human rights violations and other conflict-related sexual violence especially against women and children, the international pressure mounted on Michel Djotodia led to his resignation in January 2015 and the country handed over to Catherine Samba-Panza as head of the Transitional Government (Carayamis & Lombard, 2015). It is important to stress here that CAR has seen various peace-building efforts by the government, civil society, regional groups, and peacekeepers as well as international NGOs but all failed to meet the yearning of the people rather escalated the situation leading to the intervention of UN.

On 10 October 2013, the UN Security Council met to help secure peace, promote national reconciliation, and fortify democratic institutions, as well as strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights (Tran, 2013). This led to the establishment of UN peacekeeping operation in CAR tagged under what is known as Resolution 2121. On 1st November 2013, the Security Council officially met in New York to examine the situation in the CAR. In his statement to the Council, UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide Adama Dieng emphasized that the prevalent nature of human rights violations in the CAR could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity (Irish, 2013). He expressed worry over the increasingly sectarian dimension based on religion, which the war in CAR has taken.

Furthermore, on 22 January 2014 the UNSC met to discuss the progress of the crisis in CAR, the meeting adopted Resolution 2134 on 28 January, which allowed the deployment of a European Union (EU) force and called for enforcement of sanctions against the CAR. However, there was a delay until the Security Council passed Resolution 2149 which approved the deployment of a 10,000-strong peacekeeping operation, including 1,800 police personnel, known as the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) (UNDP, 2013).

Atrocities committed by UN Peacekeepers in the Central African Republic

UN peacekeepers are sent to war-torn countries in the world to help protect civilians and to manage the situation thereby restoring peace. Nonetheless, fingers have been pointed at some peacekeepers for committing crimes against the very people they are ought to protect. The UN has firmly declared a zero-tolerance policy on sexual abuse but victims, activists, and human rights organizations say such crimes have been allowed to go on with impunity. The horrifying descriptions of the sexual abuse by UN peacekeepers in CAR are appalling. In response to the reports of sexual abuses by the peacekeepers, the former UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon said there will be no rest until all the practices are rooted out those involved are held fully accountable" (Joanne, 2015). Nevertheless, the abuse scandals have continued.

In August 2015, Amnesty International found credible evidence that a UN peacekeeper in CAR sexually assaulted a 12-year-old girl during a 2 am search of her family's home. The 12-year-old girl had been hiding in a bathroom during a house search in a Muslim enclave of the capital, Bangui, on 2 August, she told Amnesty. A man allegedly wearing the blue helmet and vest of the UN peacekeeping forces took her outside and raped her behind a truck. She said that he dragged her out of the room, and slapped her when she started to cry. "When I cried, he slapped me hard and put his hand over my mouth," the girl was quoted as saying by Amnesty. She alleged that he brought her outside into a far corner of the courtyard behind a truck, groping her breasts and tearing her clothes. The girl later showed Amnesty her torn underwear and said: "He threw me to the ground and lay down on top of me" (Joanne, 2015). The man fled when gunfire vented outside the compound. The family members of the girl said she was separated from the rest of the family for about 20-30 minutes. The girl's mother told Amnesty that after the incident her daughter was crying and acting extremely upset. After the girl was examined by a nurse working under a doctor's supervision, there was medical evidence consistent with sexual assault (Joanne, 2015).

Nadine, a young woman whose husband was killed by fighters of the Muslim Seleka rebel group make an effort to find words and be calm as she recounts what happened to her one night in February 2015. She cried as she told the story of how she was raped by international peacekeepers. On that day the women had been out searching for her husband but it was getting dark and she could not find him, hence she headed back to the camp. At the last UN checkpoint, there were four peacekeepers. The men called her but she was unwilling to go, then one pointed a gun at her. They pushed her into a bush and raped her. When they were done, she went home and in the morning went to the MSF (Doctors Without Borders) hospital (Wambua-Soi, 2016). Nadine said she was given some drugs and advise by nurses at the hospital. She was frightened to file a report until she heard of more women and children who were accusing peacekeepers of sexual violations. In her words, "I don't want them here, they are not helpful. They sexually violate us without protection, I don't want them" (Wambua-Soi, 2016). These are just a few incidences among the numerous ones that were not mentioned or documented.

In another report, the women in some of the camps said life is hard, there's no food aid anymore, and they have to do what they can to survive, "at times we see the peacekeepers as a source of money and that means survival. They take advantage of that way by paying women or children and if that does not work then they resort to more aggressive ways of getting what they want" (Wambua-Soi, 2016: 5). It is important to note that there are many other cases of sexual abuse by the peacekeepers in CAR.

Discussions of Findings

The role of the UN is to manage, resolve conflicts and maintain peace around the world. The emergence of UN in the peace mission in CAR after the inability of the state and regional bodies to resolve the issue recorded some success. There is no doubt that UN has remained a leading player in the CAR. The UN has provided the needed support for other international groups like AU and Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). UN has no doubt shown its commitment by establishing the political negotiations. It has also helped in putting up the ceasefire commission and ceasefire monitoring force in CAR. Consequently, the UN peacekeepers were able to protect a small portion of the population. The UN has aided humanitarian assistance, monitored and verified the implementation of agreements, assisting an inclusively political process, contributing to the promotion of human rights in CAR. Furthermore, UN has significantly assisted in the formation of the transitional government, elections as well as the handing over power.

In spite of the above achievements by the UN in CAR, the managing the conflict has been a failure. There were complaints that UN forces were either failing to protect civilians or selectively doing so. There were also cases of rape against women and young girls perpetrated by UN peacekeeping missions. The force took advantage of hungry and vulnerable women and girls who had no choice but to trade their bodies for food which should be given for free. The high level of rape cases against women and young girls perpetrated by UN peacekeeping missions is disheartening. A number of civil-society organizations published a letter calling for UN transparency in response to the reports of child sexual abuse and exploitation (Mbongeh & Thiessen, 2017).

With so many negative reports leveled against UN peacekeepers in CAR and the continuous spate of distrust and silent killings as well as political acrimony, the reputation of UN is put to question. However, with the

disorganized performance noticed in CAR and other African nations, UN seems to be a toothless bulldog in the world. The UN seems to be doing a lot in speech and paper but in reality, it has done just little compared to what can actually be done to restore peace and stability in the country.

Additionally, the inability of UN to effectively tackle the problem in CAR has left the poor country vulnerable to future attacks and other implication. As it is today, it might look like the problem of the country (CAR) has been managed but the fact remains that a good number of the populace are feeling discontented with the government of the day as well as the manner in which the conflict was handled by UN. There is fear that any slight issue might lead to fresh conflict, which might add to the poor economic situation of the country.

As it is today, CAR is battling to get to the position of socio-economic development. This can only be actualized when peace, justice, and fairness is in place. This might only be possible in the case where there is political stability in the country. With the problem in the CAR, it might be difficult for the country to be attractive to foreign investors.

Conclusions

The root cause of the conflict in CAR is poor governance which was inherited from its colonist since independence. The French colonial policy in the Central African Republic set the stage for an unstable, coup-prone, and devastating country. From the coups and counter-coups of Presidents like Jean-Bedel Bokassa, David Dacko, Andre Kolingba, Ange-Felix Patasse, Francois Bozize to Michel Djotodia the Central African Republic has not known peace, stability, economic development, and good governance. Despite the fact that the UN sent peacekeepers to this war-torn country to stop or reduce the killings, the United Nations organization via the peacekeepers have failed woefully to keep the peace and protect the vulnerable population of women and children because the Seleka rebels are still having running battles with the Anti-Balakas. The UN peacekeeping force in CAR has become the highest perpetrators of rape of women and girls to the extent that the UN had to constitute a panel to investigate the allegations which were unfortunately found to be true. It is therefore self-evident that the role of the United Nations in managing the violent conflicts in the Central African Republic has failed immensely.

Recommendations

Based on the findings in this paper, the following recommendations are proffered:

- To have peace, stability, and development there is a need for JUSTICE. Thus there should be an inclusive government that will involve the marginalized faction of the country. This will make the people have a sense of belonging and also promote oneness.
- The soldiers who were found guilty of using food and money to entice underaged children and women for their sexual pleasure should be arrested and punished which will serve as a lesson to other peacekeepers who may be thinking of committing the same crime.
- The government of CAR should build a strong military force then will manage the conflict and restore peace in the country since the UN forces seem incapable of performing their duties.
- The Seleka and Anti-Balakas who were involved in killing and raping of innocent and vulnerable girls, men and women should be trialed and jailed. This will serve as a deterrent to other culprits in the Central African Republic.

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