

# SUDAN: A TEST CASE FOR AFRICAN UNION ON CONFLICT MISSION

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## **Abstract**

Post-Colonial Africa has yet too many flash points, arising from failed and weak states due to poor governance, boundary disputes, lean resources, lack of capacity, ethnic rivalries, power sharing, religious and ideological contentions. The conflict in Sudan presents an interesting scenario. At the surface, it is seemingly a religious war or political conflict. The Darfur region represents the country's sore thumb. But with oil found in the region and the Chinese prospecting there, it is abundantly clear that what originally was a religious divide (Islamists versus animists) or racial (Arab stock in the North) versus Negroid stock (in the South) is now an economic conflict. It is in this light that the conflict should be seen and the resolution efforts should be thus directed. The African Union which though at its inception is meant for economic capacity building has mediated successfully in troubled spots like in the Algeria –Morocco and Rwanda – Burundi conflicts seem to have reached a dead end in the Darfur region debacle. Is it then that the American inspired AFRICOM is Africa's solution to conflict management? Can Africa not go it alone without the UN? Should we go back to the African High Command idea of the Pan-Africanist, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah? Which conflict capacity and organizational structure should the African Union command evolve. If it is to be effective either in Sudan or in any other intractable troubled spot? This paper suggests that the African Union in conjunction with the Chinese Government, who now do mineral business with the Sudanese Government should put pressure on Sudan to accept a United Nations Hybrid force so as to have a well equipped force to secure peace in the Darfur region. Also, the African Union should group factions as well as the Khartoum Government in line with the earlier Abuja peace accords. The data have been generated largely via secondary sources (newspapers, journals, notable authority and the internet), and concludes that the African Union as it stands now does not have the military capacity to manage crisis.

## **Introduction**

When the Organization of African Unity (OAU) transmuted into the African Union (AU), the change contemplated was a move away from decolonisation, and independence issues for a more focused concern on economic issues of development in Africa. Little concern was given to possible conflicts and conflicts resolutions mechanisms.

While earlier AU efforts in Rwanda-Burundi, Liberia, Togo, Sierra Leone and Algeria-Morocco conflicts were to some degree effective, it is unconceivable now that the AU has not built enough capacity to cope with the endless war in Sudan and its last shoulder, Darfur. The averting of a coup in Anjouan, a part of Comoros Islands, by the arrival of an AU incursion force, is perhaps significant. But then this could be that the Comoros lacks a reasonable armed forces and with the dispersed nature of the numerous Islands that constitute Comoros, it was an easy win. The real test case remains, Sudan and its Darfur.

The Secretary General of the U. N. Ban Ki-Moon puts the conflict resolution in perspective when he called for an immediate focus on the fundamentals of peace and the protection of civilians in the strife-torn Darfur region by the UN approved A.U. – United Nations Hybrid operations force (UNAMID) and said:

Continued suffering is both unforgivable for peace and progress is great. Let us now dwell on what has been lost in Darfur, but call on all parties and stakeholders to immediately focus on what can be achieved by ending the hostilities, protective civilians...

Pressure must be maintained on all parties to commit to a cessation of hostilities and ultimately a ceasefire and political settlement. (Ban Ki Moon, 2008)

It is to be noted that since oil was discovered in the Darfur region, the conflict has taken a colouration of oil political conflicts. The major trading partner is China who seems to care less about human rights issues and more for their extractive trade. Oil money has been known to drive political greed, political power tussle and Darfur is enmeshed in this oil conflict.

Conflicts are always present in dynamics of inter and intrastate relations. But when it does become too frequent, it diverts attention from the more basic issues of development. When conflicts escalate and get prolonged, as has happened in the Sudan, not only substantial human and material resources are dissipated but a great deal of time, resource and energy would be used to deal with the conflict. (Imobighe, 2004:5).

This paper then seeks to deepen our understanding of the complexity of the Sudan problem, why it has become intractably, the conflict resolution mechanism available and in practice within the AU and make some recommendations that could enhance the AU in more effective conflict management approaches in resolving African States conflict.

### **Conflict Management Concepts**

Integrated conflict management in this study represents a process embracing three types of activities namely:

- Conflict prevention, peace promotion and consolidation
- Conflict control
- Conflict resolution

These three types of activities constitute the conflict management circle.

Conflict management however could be perceived as a wider concept involving conflict resolution and transformation. The latter concept is all the more important as conflicts must be managed productively to prevent an overwhelming risk to society. (Imobighe, 2003:3).

In recent years, scholars has tended to treat conflict resolution as distinct from conflict management, since the management merely refers to prevention rather than that of resolving. It should however be understood that conflict management must occur in a conducive environment full of politics. Hence mediators must be skillful to avoid potential chaos and disorderliness often found especially in political conflict situations. Again, conflict management involve, the mobilization of cultural expectations, such as in this case study, African hospitability, commensality, reciprocity and belief systems (Imobighe, 2003: 4).

### **Conflict Management Approaches**

Conflict management can be classified into two broad categories:

- a. Level of escalation, and therefore needing peaceful or military approaches. In the case where peaceful approaches are used, the hallmarks are negotiations, verbal persuasions, use of inducements, subtle manipulation, denial of privileges while in the case of military approaches, physical coercion is applied. The use of physical force could be by a party to the conflict or even a third party. The objective here is to promote the interest of one side, impose a settlement or create a diplomatic negotiation. (Imobighe, 2003: 3).
- b. The second concerns the status of participants involved in the bargaining process and is of three types:-
  - i. The legal or judicial approach
  - ii. The power-politics approach
  - iii. The conciliatory approach (Imobighe, 2003: 4).

It is interesting to note that all these approaches have been used in the Sudan crisis to no effect thus far. It appears that what has made it all intractable has been the long years of North /South war which has created bitterness and animosities. Coupled with these have been the undertone of religious and the racial divides which have overlayed biases and prejudices which are difficult undergrowth to uproot as these lie in belief system which are rooted in the souls of the conflict parties.

### **OAU /AU Conflict Management Resolution Approach**

From inception, the OAU was beset by boundary disputes upon decolonisation. Within years of its establishment, the OAU had to deal with six boundary conflicts, three of which led to violent clashes (Morocco –Algeria; Ethiopia-Somalia; Kenya –Somalia).

While it has also been established that natural disasters wrought by drought and famine exacerbated the human sufferings, the civil wars in these countries not only brought food production to a halt, but became contributory factors to the conflicts. (Ikelegbe: 2006).

The OAU/AU did intervene in some of these crises and with good results. In the case of the Morocco –Algeria, after some initial hesitation on the part of Morocco, Emperor Haile Selassie arranged a meeting in Bamako, Mali, on October 29<sup>th</sup> –30<sup>th</sup> 1963 which resulted in a ceasefire agreement resulting in the Bamako Communiqué. In the main, there was the immediate end to hostile propaganda attacks on November 1<sup>st</sup> 1963 and an immediate end to hostilities on November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1963.

A demilitarized zone was established, both sides withdrew their troops and diplomatic relations were resumed by mid April 1964. By May 11<sup>th</sup> 1964, relations between the two countries had improved to the extent that there was exchange of prisoners. The two countries proceeded on a peace path further by establishing a mixed committee at ambassadorial levels. Although the agreements worked a steep forward in the normalization of relations, it was to take many more years of bilateral negotiation before they could arrive at a final settlement on June 15<sup>th</sup> 1972 at an OAU summit in Rabat, Morocco. No doubt, the OAU played a critical role in jumpstarting the initial stages of the negotiations. But that it concluded in a peaceful resolution revealed the successful management of conflict by the organization. In the case of Rwanda-Burundi, the conflict was brought to the attention of the OAU in February 1964 by the Ugandan Government. The initial concern of the OAU was to deal with the refugee problem and reduce its potential to spill over into an inter-state conflict. The OAU had correctly identified the refugee problem as at the root of the inter-state conflict, which indeed was a positive assessment. The fact that Burundi re-acted to the death of their President in an ethnic violence had nothing to do with the mediation efforts of the OAU. (Imobighe, 2003:34-35). These cases appear success stories, while the OAU, existed. The Darfur case was to be the first rest case of the AU.

### **Darfur Conflict**

As at April 2008, some 4.27 million civilians, including 2.45 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) continue to suffer as a result of ongoing attacks by armed forces and other groups. More than 100,000 civilians have been forced to flee in 2008 alone, while women and humanitarian workers continue to be targeted. The conflict has jeopardized regional stability and threatens the historic peace agreement that ended one of Africa's longest and bloodiest wars between Government and "rebels" in Southern Sudan.

The International Community has spent close to \$1 billion per year in the past three years on humanitarian assistance and recovery operations in Darfur in the hope that peace and development would follow. As at the end of April 2009, the total strength of the Hybrid force (U.N and AU) was 9,212 uninformed personnel, including 7,467 troops, 1,605 police officers in addition to 1,312 civilians.

The U. N. however considers that the force still lacks critical assets that would make the hybrid force respond to the challenges and complex environment it finds itself. The assets so needed include one heavy and one medium ground transport unit, three military utility aviation units, comprising 18 helicopters in total, as well as additional attack helicopters.

That the United Nations is the driving force of this combat readiness, which must come from willing contributors outside the continent only reveals either the lack of political will on the part of AU members or that the kitting and funding of only an AU force is beyond the members. It is now clearer why AU has hardly gone beyond pleas and rhetories. The Darfur conflict can only be managed by physical force and superior firepower, which the AU lacks.

### **Darfur Conflict in History**

The conflict in Darfur Western Sudan dates back to 1987 when the Arab government in Khartoum armed local Arabs against the local farming communities of the Fur, Zaghawa and Masalit people, having made efforts to disarm them in February, 2003. The Sudan Liberation Army formed in

1980, a black Africa rebel group based in the Fur area, launched attacks on government positions in Darfur. The government responded with an unprecedented assault using its regular military force and the so called Janjaweed militia, made up of Arabs recruited mainly from the Bayarra people.

This more than 23 years conflict is said to have begun on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2003, when a group calling itself the Darfur Liberation Front (DLF) publicly claimed credit for an attack on Gola, the Headquarter of Jebel Marra District. Prior to this attack however, a conflict had erupted in Darfur when rebels attacked police stations. However, on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 2006, the government of Sudan signed a truce with a faction of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) led by Mine Minnawi. The agreement was rejected by two smaller groups, the Justice and Equality Movement and a rival faction of the SLA in July –August 2006. between July and August 2006, foreign aid agencies threatened to shut shown their aid operations as International aid organizations considered leaving due to attacks against their personnel. The then United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Anna called for 17,000 man international peace keeping force to the region in order to replace a weak African Union Force of 7000. (Humphrey, 1987: 307).

### **Darfur Hybrid Force**

The U. N. and the A. U. on the 4<sup>th</sup> November 2006 signed a co-operation agreement in Addis Ababa. The agreement was meant to enhance a UN-AU multilateral co-operation in a UNAMID force as well as facilitate peace, growth and development on the African continent. (Humphrey, 1987: 309).

The Sudanese government did initially, for reasons best known to it, insists that AU remains in charge of any future peace keeping force in Darfur thereby rejecting a joint command with the United Nations. The Sudanese foreign minister IAM AKOL did announce that there would be no talk about a mixed force and that there would be no UN troops in Darfur (Guardian, 2006: 10). However, towards the end of 2007, upon diplomatic interventions, in view of the huge human sufferings in Darfur, the Government in Khartoum did relent on the hybrid force.

### **African Union: Darfur Crisis Management Outcome**

The A. U. by its mediation efforts did demonstrate that Africans can solve their own problems and prove to be an effective regional body that could be counted on. The AU at first did succeed in bringing the Sudanese government, a rebel group, the Justice and Equality Movement and the Sudanese Liberation Army Movement to the Chadian capital N'djamena and was successful in pressing them to agree on a ceasefire which was strengthened in November that same year with the two sides signing another set of protocols on security and humanitarian aid in the Abuja talks. But the too many sets of rebel fractional groups many of whom refused to sign the accords, made nonsense of the Abuja agreements. The A. U. had hoped to pass its first real test to peace and security on the continent (United Nations News Service), but not having the adequate tooling of a force, more so when there is no political will and adequate finding, the conflict resolution efforts were bound to fail or at best intractable.

One of the key strategies for the resolution of the conflict in Darfur is the control of the militias and other armed gangs who now roam the region. Some observers have doubt whether the government in Khartoum retains control over the Janjaweed militia. International attention to Darfur has been slow partly due to several factors; the remoteness of the region, the lack of the access by humanitarian agencies, journalists and international observers. Darfur is considered an unhelpful distraction from the ongoing peace negotiations to settle the over twenty-three year conflict in Southern Sudan.

It was only in January 2004 after growing international media attention and increasing calls by the UN that Western governments and organizations became more concerned about the sharp humanitarian deterioration conditions and intensified war in Darfur. The European Union, United States, African Union and others including the Un agencies voiced fears on the destabilizing impact of the conflict. Chadian military forces have been active along the border between both countries and are conducting cross border pursuits of the Janjaweed back into Sudan. (Human Right Watch 18).

Numerous meetings to halt the violence in Sudan Darfur region have ended without breakthroughs. Several African leaders have met over the deployment of the A. U. and the U. N. hybrid force in the war torn region but without a definitive peace in sight.

The AU rose from its third ordinary session of its annual summit on July 8 2004 expressing deep concern about the prevailing situation in Darfur and particularly the humanitarian problems generated by the conflict and the continued report of violations of human rights by marauding militias especially the Janjaweed. The summit decided to strengthen the A. U. ceasefire observer monitoring group by a protection force to be deployed to Darfur (Guardian, 2006: 11). The official birth of the A. U. in 2002 marked the beginning of an ambitious policy. Post Independence Africa has faced numerous crises and the O. A. U. in most case has proved unable to resolve them. Its planned mediation, reconciliation and arbitration commission though established, does not seem to have a bite. There is lack of adequate funding, no standing force, and the force it hammers lacks adequate and modern capability. (Sunday Sun, 2004: 8).

Besides, the mediation efforts lack any coherence and comprehensive pattern. No matter the force in use unless diplomacy fires the negotiations, coupled with a clearer identification of the complex causes, the AU intervention would end up in smoke. It is surprising that with the peer review mechanism many questions still arise. Is it that Africans lack the skills of conflict negotiations? Could it be that despite the African Peer Review mechanism, Africans are unable to exert the right influence over each other states? Do we need to re-invent the once discarded African High Command or the new conceptualized American idea of AFRICOM? Without a superior force for mediations and interventions, Sudan just like Somalia would be lost cases and may soon drift into the arena of failed states.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The African Union does not have the military might to manage crisis effectively. A major setback of the Union is that most African States are strongly dependent on external promptings and African crises cannot wait.

Since external mediation has not been palatable to Sudan, it is incumbent the Sudanese government devices workable and strategic mechanisms to end its persistent civil wars and conflicts.

In view of our investigations, this paper recommends the government of Sudan should:

- a. Provide protection to displaced civilians.
- b. Stop supporting the Janjaweed militias and take measures to disband them.
- c. Carry out investigation on human rights abuses.
- d. Give cover and allow humanitarian agencies to go into Darfur.

### **What the African Union Should Do:**

- a. Insist that the government of Sudan protects civilians, disarm and disband militias, facilitates full, secure and unimpeded access by humanitarian agencies.
- b. Ensure that the Sudanese government co-operates with the U. N.
- c. Secure the co-operation of China, which has the biggest influence on Sudan's government since the crisis has some economic than political tones.
- d. Engage in active diplomatic talks with the Sudanese government and rebel groups so that there can be a permanent ceasefire.
- e. Fund increase and arm troops in Darfur.
- f. That the African troops should move to secure the peace in Darfur.

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