

Québec Undergraduate Security Conference Research Paper: The dichotomy between normative goals of UNAMID and local realities in Darfur

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Abstract: The United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) epitomizes the first operationalization of the responsibility to protect (R2P) norm in the security agenda of the United Nations and was initially framed as a success. The international civil society advocacy under the “Save Darfur” coalition played a primordial role in the mission’s establishment and successfully challenged the realist assumption that the states’ self-interestedness trumps the moral imperatives for humanitarian intervention. However, this paper shows that, at the time of operationalization, the

mission’s effectiveness was inhibited by the dichotomy between these normative demands and the local realities of Darfur. The normative demands of the international civil society, influenced by the new R2P norm, were instrumental in the creation of UNAMID, but this led decision-makers to ignore the local realities of Darfur, primarily characterized by Khartoum’s obstructionism and the structure of the hybrid mission. This has not only hindered the effectiveness of UNAMID’s practical implementation but also contributed to the alienation of the prospect of peace in

Darfur. The case of Darfur reveals that implementing R2P faces practical and structural constraints because activities are not framed according to the local realities.

The dichotomy between normative goals of UNAMID and the local realities in Darfur

On July 31, 2007, the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1769 formally established the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). The peace-keeping operation has been on the ground for 12 years, as one of the largest and most expensive mission ever deployed (Henke 2019). Its core mandate is the protection of civilians, alongside the provision of security for humanitarian assistance

and the support and the effective implementation of agreements (Lanz 2015). But, as these objectives remain for most parts unattained, the effectiveness of the mission is questionable. What accounts for UNAMID's mixed record since its implementation?

UNAMID was created by the international community in response to the violence that plagued Darfur's region of East-Sudan since 2003 opposing rebel groups, principally the Sudanese People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA /M) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), to progovernment militias, principally the Janjaweed, an armed group composed of Arabs herding tribes. Although the dissatisfaction principally stems from the

historical marginalization of Darfur from Sudanese political and economic life, divisions between the non-Arab and mostly non-Muslim majority of Darfur's population and the Arab minority have been exacerbated by the government divide-and-rule tactics and by the decreasing availability of arable land due to desertification (De Waal 2007).

In this paper, I will argue that the dichotomy between the normative demands of the international civil society and the concrete requirements for a sustainable peace in Darfur hindered UNAMID's effectiveness. Firstly, I will analyze how normative demands of the international civil society, influenced by the new R2P norm, were instrumental in the

creation of UNAMID. Then I will show that this led decision-makers to ignore the local realities of Darfur, primarily characterized by Khartoum's obstructionism and the structure of the hybrid mission. Finally, I will demonstrate how this has not only hindered the effectiveness of UNAMID's practical implementation but also contributed to alienating the prospect of peace in Darfur.

The normative demands of the international civil society

UNAMID came about principally as a result of the international civil society pressure to protect human security. The concept of human security arose in the international system at

the end of the Cold War and has been increasingly recognized since the responsibility to protect (R2P) was embraced by the UN membership at the 2005 World Summit (Badescu and Bergholm 2009). It emphasizes a people-centric approach to security rather than a state-centric approach: citizens' security has to be protected by the state. Failure to do so constitutes a threat to international peace and security and militarily intervention is thus possible under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (Silander 2013). R2P is rooted in a fundamental paradox between the moral imperatives for intervention and the realist assumption that states will never act without some self-interests (Silander 2013). This is the traditional

argument used to explain the failure of peace-keeping operations, with the main example being the failure of the UN to prevent the Rwandan genocide. Thus, some have argued that the lack of will of great powers is what explains the limited achievements of UN actions in Darfur (Frieden et al 2016).

However, the international civil society and non-state actors can help overcome this paradox; indeed, international activism has been the driving factor behind the creation of UNAMID troops. It is the persistent lobbying of the Save Darfur movement, "arguably the largest international social movement since anti-apartheid," that pushed the UN to respond to Darfur's crisis (Lanz

2009). The political aim of the movement gradually shifted from establishing a UN support of AMIS (the African Union mission on the ground since 2004), to sending a UN peacekeeping mission in Darfur to protect civilians. By 2007, more than 160 faith-based, advocacy and humanitarian organizations gathered under the “Save Darfur Coalition” to shape government policy through public pressure (Mamdani 2009). The Save Darfur Movement’s demands became gradually included in the political agendas of the United States, France, and the United Kingdom. More specifically it led the former US Secretary of State Powell to acknowledge that the Darfur conflict constituted a genocide in 2004.

In 2007, President Sarkozy and Prime Minister Brown jointly co-wrote an op-ed piece in *The Times*, reaffirming their determination to “Save Darfuris” (Lanz 2009). Thus, UNAMID’s mixed record cannot be explained by the traditional paradox of R2P, namely the realist assumption that national interests determine states’ actions and discredit the moral imperatives for intervention. However, UNAMID was constrained by another paradox that became salient when R2P was operationalized: it stems from the dichotomy between normative demands and local realities.

The Save Darfur movement’s normative demands oversimplified Darfur’s situation. The

principal motivation behind the Save Darfur Coalition was to prevent another Rwandan genocide from happening. Indeed, it is only in March 2004 at the 10-year commemoration of the Rwandan genocide, when then UN under-secretary of Humanitarian Affairs declared that “the only difference between Rwanda and Darfur now is the number involved,” that the international community started to mobilize, influenced by media campaigns and opinion leaders’ interventions (Jumbert and Lanz 2013, 198). However, framing the conflict as a genocide simply opposing Arabs to non-Arabs overlooked the underlying complexities of the opposition of tribes with homeland and those without, impacted by long-lasting colonial

legacies and competition over scarce resources. This oversimplified anti-genocide rhetoric impacted the movement in several ways (Mamdani 2009, 71). First, it focused on external intervention to solve the conflict, rather than on domestic processes (Lanz 2009). Secondly, it favored military over political strategies to solve the conflict (Mamdani 2009). And lastly, it led to over-targeting the Sudanese government (Duursma and Müller 2019). Some argue that the framing of the conflict in oversimplified terms is explained by the neocolonial logic in which it is rooted, where the movement reflects the global hegemonic agenda of the US as “the humanitarian face of the war on terror” (Mamdani 2009). Others

argue that the movement had genuine good-intentions as they defended the compelling cause of R2P and that the oversimplification was inevitable when “blindly projecting liberal norms on a complicated world” (Lanz 2009, 670). Either way, framing the Darfurian situation as “a genocide that had to be prevented” is what impaired Save Darfur’s rhetoric after being what accounted for its success in mobilizing support and thus in implementing the peacekeeping mission.

The fragility of Darfur’s peace agreement shows that the main motivation behind the mission’s implementation was the normative demands of the Save Darfur movement and not actual peace. In general, peacekeeping missions

are implemented to support the enforcement of a sustainable and comprehensive peace agreement; thus, the head of the UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) Jean-Marie Guehénno was reluctant to deploy UN peacekeepers to Darfur until 2006 (Lanz 2015). In 2006, the government and the SLA signed the DPA which paved the way for UN Security Council Resolution 1679, which recommended that “concrete steps be taken to effect the transition from AMIS to a United Nations operation” (Lanz 2015, 782). However, the DPA was drafted by a handful of individuals under extreme time pressure: it was drafted in three months and did not fully develop the concepts required for peace because of the

assumption that peacetalks would continue (de Waal 2007). The fragility of the peace agreement reflects the particularity of the international response to the Darfur crisis: the peace agreement wasn't the primary *raison d'être* of the deployment of UN troops, but it was drafted to legitimize it. The peace agreement "satisfied the political requirement of having a political framework that would provide direction to UN peacekeepers," without bringing tangible peace (Lanz 2015, 782). Thus, by focusing on the R2P norm, the normative demands of the international civil society paradoxically gave the peace agreement a secondary place in the peacekeeping mission's objectives.

Local realities and constraints

The normative demands of the international society pressured the UN to take action, and the framing of the conflict as a genocide imposed military intervention as the only answer to Darfur's crisis. This political imperative of deploying a peacekeeping mission pressured the UN to ignore the local institutional context of the Darfurian crisis, thus constraining the strategic implementation of the mission.

Initially, the implementation of a UN peacekeeping mission in Darfur was opposed by Khartoum. President Bashir argued that the international force had a hidden agenda of regime

change (Mamdani 2009), in the context of the US invasion of Iraq and the general reluctance to allow the UN in a Muslim country. China opposed the resolution too, putting forth the argument that it violated state sovereignty. As an alternative to a UN-led peacekeeping mission, Kofi Annan introduced the idea of a hybrid mission, jointly operationalized by the UN and the AU, emphasizing on the “predominantly African character” of the mission (Lanz 2015, 782). From 2006 on, it is the “quiet diplomacy” employed by Ban Ki Moon that convinced Khartoum to give its consent for UNAMID (Gowan 2011, 402). Thus, Khartoum’s obstructionism was artificially resolved by the creation of a hybrid

mission and by Ban’s diplomacy. This had several problematic implications.

Firstly, Khartoum’s reluctance was never completely overcome and this impeded the mission’s effectiveness. As the UNAMID force started to form, President Bashir found ways to impede its development. For instance, he delayed the deployment of authorized military personnel by withholding hundreds of visas for UNAMID staff or preventing the importation of necessary equipment (Lanz 2015). Additionally, peacekeeping forces were victims of armed attacks, some of them traced back to government-affiliated militias with the intent to intimidate the peacekeepers (Lanz 2015).

UNAMID was thus limited by the tenuous host-state consent, that was overlooked at the time of implementation because of the normative demands of the international community dictated the political imperatives of a UN mission.

The attitude of then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon towards UNAMID is yet another manifestation of the Save Darfur pressure to promote R2P without considering the complexity of the local context. Ban took office on 1 January 2007 and his success in implementing the UNAMID mission, to which Kofi Annan was personally committed, was a crucial early test of his abilities (Gowan 2011). The political imperative to implement a peacekeeping mission

led him to neglect a more in-depth assessment of the operationalization of the mission. Paradoxically, Ban's general attitude towards peacekeeping arguably signals "a deeper skepticism about the operational effectiveness of peacekeeping" (Gowan 2011). Guehenno's description of peacekeeping as the "aspirin of international security" underlines the generalized doubt amongst UN officials about the effectiveness of peacekeeping. This explains how peacekeeping could be used as a tool to respond to international civil society's demands but not genuinely to solve the crisis. This explains, in turn, the neglected assessment of the mission's operationalization and of the constraining institutional context.

Lastly, the solution of a hybrid mission faced structural challenges that impeded the mission's effectiveness too. Hybridity is used to describe the modular, multi-actor structure of peacekeeping operations that brings multiple institutions to cooperate in a joint endeavor (Tardy 2014). Beyond the burden-sharing rationale, hybrid peacekeeping operations are implemented on the assumption that diverse sources of strategic inputs will enhance the comprehensive-ness of crisis management policies (Tardy 2014). However, hybrid peacekeeping missions are structurally limited by several factors. Firstly, they require excessive coordination, which has often been hard to attain in the case of UNAMID.

The political divergence of the two institutions has led, according to Annan, to "two sets of strategic guidance as to implementation of the missions' mandate" (Tardy 2014, 109). Secondly, hybrid missions can undermine the political coherence of the international response because of complex administrative and procedural frameworks. For instance, UNAMID has arguably brought more administrative inertia than it has brought political coherence (Thardy 2014). Furthermore, hybridity threatens the mission's accountability and ownership. Whereas the AU's ownership was limited because of structural and financial reasons, the UN has de facto relinquished some of its control over the UNAMID implementation, for example with

the appointment of a joint UN-AU head of mission. Furthermore, the mission struggled to secure more needed material and was affected by the lack of coherent training.

Thus, the UNAMID peacekeeping mission was weakened by Karthoum's obstructionism, by the general skepticism surrounding peacekeeping effectiveness and by the precarious hybrid mission's structure.

Consequences on the mission's effectiveness and the Darfur situation

I will now analyze the effect that this had on the practical implementation of the mission by assessing its accomplishments and its limitations, and then the broader impact that the mission had on

the Darfur situation. Firstly, the mission brought about limited developments for disarmament and ceasefire. De Waal (2007) argues that these two concepts are central requirements for peace in Darfur. However, they remain insufficiently addressed. For instance, the DPA failed to incorporate all armed groups in the agreement. Furthermore, the ceasefire plan was drafted early and the changing context, especially the arrival of new rebel groups on the field, changed the requirements for a successful peace agreement. The question of disarmament of Janjaweed militias posed a real challenge when the DPA was drafted, as imposing disarmament by force would not only be dangerous but also naïve (De Waal 2007).

Thus, the DPA charged the Sudanese government with the responsibility to disarm militias, and the UNAMID role was to “monitor, verify and promote these efforts.” Consequently, the peacekeeping operation was deployed without addressing the modalities of arms control.

Secondly, the achievement of the core mandate, the protection of civilians, was partly defective. The mission adopted the Darfur Protection Strategy, which focused on protection by presence (Lanz 2015). This strategy aimed at deterring armed attacks against civilians and was partially successful, as it drastically increased the political cost of carrying out atrocities such as those that happened in

2003-4. The number of civilian casualties substantially dropped with AMIS and remained relatively low when UNAMID took over (Mamdani 2009). However, this strategy also recognized that only half of Darfur’s eight million inhabitants was accessible to UNAMID, because of the size of the territory, the instability of the conflict, the inadequacy of the equipment and the limited number of military personnel (Lanz 2015). UNAMID also failed to rightfully address some attacks perpetuated by government-affiliated militias, not accurately reporting massacres and downplaying their ethnic character (Lanz 2015). Thus, UNAMID’s broken promises left many Darfuris disappointed. Local perceptions of the

mission's effectiveness were very suspicious and differed in many ways from UNAMID's official discourse (Müller and Bashar 2017). This shows the low level of trust between the local populations and UNAMID peacekeeping forces and the dichotomy between the UN discourse and the local experienced realities.

Finally, international involvement has complicated the conflict in Darfur. Principally, the fact that international attention was overwhelmingly directed towards the government's role in the conflict was not conducive to conflict resolution. This is illustrated by how the indictment of President Al Bashir by the ICC has arguably exacerbated Khartoum's obstructi-

onist policies (Duursma and Müller 2019). Furthermore, as the government's legitimacy was questioned internationally, the position of rebels' groups was strengthened domestically. The rebel cause was solidified by becoming a "globalized rebellion" and this promoted maximalist demands on their end (Jumbert and Lanz 2013). This echoes with De Waal (2009) analysis that as politics in countries with weak states institutions are characterized by competition over patrimony, conflicts in these states are resolved by elites bargaining. Imposing onerous peace settlements is unlikely to succeed because they will only be used as instruments in the hands of political actors, such as the government or the

rebel groups (De Waal 2009). This brought UNAMID in a paradoxical situation. Because peacekeeping forces changed the relations of power established among the different local actors and because they are drawn in the calculations in this competition for power, mediating peace seems impossible without international involvement. Thus, although UNAMID's effectiveness can be questioned and although it made peace less likely, it created a situation where it cannot withdraw without danger of further violent conflict. Thus, instead of implementing normative demands international institutions should frame their activities according to the local realities.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown that UNAMID deployment came as a result of the international civil society's normative demands for R2P and that military intervention was imposed as the only solution by the anti-genocide rhetoric of these demands. This political imperative to send peacekeeping troops led the UN to overlook national constraints and local realities of Darfur's situation. This, in turn, explains the limited achievements of the mission especially concerning its core mandate, the protection of civilians. More importantly, the pursuit of normative goals by UNAMID changed the power distribution among local actors and this antagonized the prospect

of peace, as well as the exit strategy of UNAMID. Thus, this peacekeeping mission was not restrained by the fundamental paradox of R2P that opposes realist assumptions to moral imperatives, but instead it was restrained when R2P was operationalized, by the dichotomy that emerged between normative goals and local realities.

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