



Protection of Civilians and Peacekeepers



Photo: UN troops protecting civilian convoy in Sudan

Source: VOA

BACKGROUND

Before the 1990s, most of the armed conflicts in Africa were fought between states. However, the inter-states conflicts shifted to intra-state conflicts in the early 1990s following the end of the Cold War. These intra-states conflicts are rarely fought on the battlefields away from civilian populated areas. They are mainly fought in public spaces, in the streets, schools and market places. The consequences are that today

South Sudan, Sudan, Central African Republic (CAR) and Somalia spare no one - neither combatants nor civilians; neither men nor women; neither children nor adults. Every year in Africa, thousands of people die and others

are forced to leave their homes and their countries due to the complex and intractable nature of the conflicts. Civilians have increasingly become the principal targets of fighting between hostile belligerents rather than being the indirect victims.

The increased civilian-combatant interface in contemporary conflicts has necessitated both doctrinal and operational shifts in United Nations (UN) and Regional Peace Operations in Africa. This was expressly important because the wider credibility of any peace operations depends on the Protection of Civilians (PoC). Consequently, since 1999 when the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was first mandated by the UN Security Council Resolution 1270 (1999)

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afford protection to civilians under imminent threat of physical violence contemporary peace operations in Africa have operated with such mandates. PoC has become an integral component in peacekeeping mandates, with mission specific strategies to guide and improve the police components.

Notwithstanding the efforts to protect civilians under imminent threats, PoC continues to be a major problem for peacekeeping missions in Africa. UN and African Union (AU) peacekeepers continue to face constant violent attacks, obstructions and intimidations by armed and terrorist groups, many of whom have access to sophisticated weapons and technology. They are also confronted with several operational challenges including difficulties in identifying who a civilian is; lack of strategic consent, volatile environments, multiplicity of armed groups, and inadequate capabilities (funding, logistics, training and technology).

With the increasing unabated attacks against civilians and peacekeepers by armed and terrorist groups, it is imperative to assess the effectiveness of the existing approaches and strategies developed to prevent and respond to the threats. Furthermore, given the dangerous operational environments and the fact that some peacekeeping missions operate in remote locations where there is little or no infrastructure, it is instructive to explore how advanced technologies can be effectively used to make faster and more informed decisions, and better protect civilians and uniformed personnel.

Although, some of the advanced technologies such as unmanned aerial vehicles, sensors and security devices, tethered observational balloons, and advanced analysis software may present challenges and exciting opportunities, their effective application can undoubtedly contribute towards the protection of civilians and peacekeepers. Overall, applying novel approaches to global and regional peace operations can help peacekeepers fulfil their civilian protection mandates to ensure safer and more successful missions.

Further areas of enquiry include the following:

- Who is a civilian and how does the definition affect the Protection of Civilians in UN and regional peace operations?
- What is the nature of the threat against civilians and peacekeepers in the conflict areas?
- Why are civilians and peacekeepers being targeted by armed, criminal and terrorist groups and, sometimes Government Forces?
- What are the existing approaches and strategies used to prevent, mitigate and respond to the threats against civilians and peacekeepers and the implementation challenges?
- How can advanced technologies help prevent, mitigate and respond to threats against civilians and peacekeepers in the missions theatres?

About KAIPTC

Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) is an internationally preferred centre of excellence for research into and training for conflict prevention, management and resolution, research and innovative thinking in integrated peace support operations and sustainable delivery of enhanced regional capacity building for peace support operations.

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