

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the role played by external actors in contemporary African civil conflicts with specific attention to South Africa's leading role in addressing Burundi's intractable civil conflict. The inquiry was guided by looking at SA's efforts in managing Burundi's peace process in partnership with key external parties such as the Regional Initiative for peace in Burundi, AU and the UN; and by examining the level of success of SA's involvement in the peace process and limitations encountered in pursuing diplomatic/political and military efforts aimed at resolving the civil conflict. The theories of conflict resolution and protracted social change, and scholarly and policy literature on intervention were drawn upon to frame the research.

The struggle for political power explains the key root cause to Burundi's civil conflict; rival politicians manipulated ethnicity and the past injustices, which are rooted in colonial policies of divide and rule, as tools in an attempt to accede to power and thereby, gain economic advantage at the expense of others. SA diplomatic efforts played an important role in addressing this by advocating for political and military power sharing.

In order to reconcile and manage differences in approaches that were advocated to deal with the Burundi civil conflict, SA mobilized for support in Burundi's neighbouring countries so as to back a peaceful solution to address the conflict. Further, in an effort to bolster its troops and, therefore, expand operations designed to promote peace in Burundi, SA had to merge into the African Mission in Burundi, and cooperate with the UN in order for the latter to render impetus to the peace process by, providing necessary resources and political support for the Burundi peace mission, and subsequently to assume the mission by taking over from the African mission.

Although SA's troop deployment provided protection for the former Hutu exile politicians and thereby, encouraged them to participate in negotiations and the transitional government, which participation increased chances of success in the peace process, however, SA did not do much in peacekeeping under the UN due to inadequate military equipments; civilians continued to be killed in the presence of SA troops, even though, under the UN their role extended to include civilian protection.

To the extent that SA's intensive diplomatic efforts resulted in the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi, however, a number of Burundian parties did not participate in the signing of the agreement and the rebel movements were excluded from the process. Thus, the Arusha peace process failed to attain consensus in addressing Burundi's contentious issues.

Although the UN peacekeepers in Burundi, of which SA was part, had a Chapter VII mandate to enforce the peace of which civilian protection was part of their mission, they did not exercise it. Intervention was constrained by the Burundian government; they argued that the ultimate authority in maintaining security throughout the country rested on them. Moreover, it is difficult if not impossible to observe UN traditional peacekeeping norms while at the same time having to implement the responsibility to protect, which has been occasioned by the post-Cold War world, in which human rights have gained wider recognition, and international norms of sovereignty and non-intervention redefined. Thus, strict observance of the UN traditional peacekeeping norms, inhibit intervention aimed to protect civilians facing catastrophic circumstances or under imminent threat.