The New Landscape of Conflict in Africa: Interrogating the Role of the United Nations, 2000-2023

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Abstract: The paper examines the role of the United Nations as a guarantor of global peace and security, and the changing landscape of conflict in Africa in the 21st century. Africa as a continent, since the beginning of the 21st century has been plagued by a complex and diverse plethora of socio-economic, political and environmental challenges that constitute a clog in the wheel of economic development and political stability. From the findings, the study reveals that of the fourteen ongoing UN peacekeeping operations globally, seven are presently ongoing in Africa. The study further reveals that most of these conflicts are resource-based conflict arising over economic alienation, unequal distribution of wealth, competition for power, and climate change arising from resource depletion and population explosion. The study observes that some of the challenges facing the United Nations Peacekeeping operations in ongoing conflicts in Africa are multidimensional and calls for swift ranging reforms. Such challenges include the role of the host state, terrorism and counterterrorism, sexual abuse, and human rights violations by peacekeeping troops, inability of troops in protecting civilian population from genocide and state sponsored violence. The study also reveals that the multi-polarity of actors who recently intervened in African conflicts such as Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Turkey etc. do not have any strategic interest but rather a destabilizing role should be of serious concern to the stability of the continent. This is because the prospect of resolving such conflict through diplomacy and multilateral peacekeeping operations using the United Nations, regional bodies such as the African Union, ECOWAS, AGAD, SADDC etc. becomes a herculean task. The study therefore, recommends that the UN rules of engagement in conflict prevention and management be reformed, so as to ensure that peacekeeping troops who are found guilty of committing heinous crimes such as sexual assault, rape, indiscipline, murder, should be prosecuted by the host state where the crime was committed.

Keywords: United Nations, Multilateral Diplomacy, Conflict, Landscape, Human rights, War, Africa

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Introduction

Africa as a continent, since the beginning of the 21st century has been plagued by a complex and diverse plethora of socio-economic, political and environmental challenges that constitute a clog in the wheel of economic development and political stability (Galadima, 2020). The African region is a region of mixed blessings characterized by wealth in terms of abundance natural and mineral resources and misery in terms of violent conflicts, corruption, political instability, economic stagnation and poverty driven by economic and social inequality in the society. In a study carried out by Oxfam in 2008, Africa lost an estimated $18 billion dollars on yearly basis through violent conflicts, as human capital, lives, property and economic activities worth trillions of dollars are lost.This poses serious threats to her socio-economic and infrastructural development (Maphosa, 2018). Since 1960s, Africa has been plagued with fratricidal wars caused by colonial legacies, ethnic dominations, economic exclusions, greed, competition for power and natural resources, and this has continued till date. The patterns and dimensions of conflicts in Africa in particular and the globe in general have also changed in the 21st century This development is caused by the advent of modern terrorism and insurgency driven by globalization and

technological innovation in warfare. The above challenges are what prompted the current configuration of the continent as, 'The Black Man's Burden' (Davidson, 1992).

The year 1960, which was declared by the United Nations as the "Year of Independence for continent of Africa, some African states were still under colonial rule" In the post-1960s, several African states were greeted with intra and inter-state conflicts such as Zaire, Central African Republic, Uganda, Nigeria, Burundi, Angola, Rwanda. These countries were the first to welcome the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations amid humanitarian assistance in the continent of Africa. According to Galadima, (2020, p. 296), "immediately after independence, ethnic conflict over access to power and resources erupted in Zaire, Central African Republic, Burundi and Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone." Also Uganda witnessed armed uprising; a civil war in Sudan and a border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea; conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia, conflict between Sudan and Uganda, and between Nigeria and Chad over border (Wasara, 2002). The list of intra and inter-state conflicts in Africa is endless and ongoing. According to Oladipo, (2017), of the BBC Monitoring African Security correspondent, the UN spends an average of $8 billion (£6.5 billion) annually on peacekeeping operations around the world, with the bulk going to missions in Africa.

The office of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operation (UNPKO) had also responded swiftly to some of these conflicts to avert ethnic cleansing and humanitarian disasters on victims and this had been well applauded. On the contrary the UN had also responded slowly in the midst of humanitarian crises and genocides; this incurred global criticism and condemnation. The Rwandan genocide of 1994, where over 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus were slaughtered while the international community represented by the United Nations as a collective security system meant to contain any acts of aggression and threats to humanity watched helplessly while humanity was being consumed and destroyed. The major power players and hegemon like the United States, European Union and Russia were also indifferent to the acts of genocide been committed, because Rwanda was of no strategic interest to them unlike the blood diamonds of Angola and Sierra Leone (Alex, 2022; Johan, 2008)

Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the challenges faced by the United Nations humanitarian intervention in Africa arising from the new landscape of conflict in the region. This deemed necessary, to assess the efforts of various stakeholders in ensuring that, peoples of the continent, are safe and disputes are managed diplomatically.

Endless and Bloody Resource Curse Conflicts in Africa

The African continent is blessed with both renewable and non-renewable natural and mineral resources such as gold diamond, cobalt, oil and gas, coal, water, forests, fisheries, grazing pastures etc. Thus, for example Nigeria is a primary producer and net exporter of oil and gas; Angola (oil and diamond); Sierra Leone (diamond); South Africa (Gold); Central African Republic (gold and diamond); Libya (oil and gas); South-Sudan (oil); Liberia (Iron, diamond, rubber); Democratic Republic of Congo (diamond, cobalt, gold, copper) and so on.

Consequently, in most of the economies in Africa, natural resources in the extractive industry such as crude oil, gold, diamond, cobalt remains the commanding heights of the economy, making the economy undiversified and mono-product leading to "the Dutch disease and rentier syndrome" of Karl Lynn's Paradox of Plenty and Resource Curse thesis (Maphosa, 2012). Therefore, in spite of the huge petro-dollars earns from the oil wind fall, it has not translated to positive economic outcome in terms of economic prosperity and better standard of living, leading to the resource curse thesis and paradox of plenty as expounded by Terry Lynn Karl. The paradox of plenty and resource curse syndrome has led to what scholars called the "Dutch Disease". The Dutch disease is when huge revenues earned from natural resource as foreign exchange earning has led to the abandonment of other export and import earning products like timber, cocoa, palm-oil, etc. making the economy mono-product. The paradox of plenty has also led to rent-seeking economy in both Nigeria and other mineral dependent economies in Africa such as D. R. Congo, Gabon, Angola, and Sierra Leone where political elites are only interested in taking rents (royalties) from mineral extraction instead of investing in economic diversification and building critical infrastructures that can facilitate economic growth and development.

For example, the oil sector in Nigeria accounts for over 80% of foreign exchange earnings and 80% of national budget but contributes less than 10% to the GDP of the country, showing an abysmal and unequal distribution of income, therefore, becoming a potential source of conflict. Thus, the blood diamonds of Angola, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and oil in Sudan, Libya and Nigeria (Niger Delta) had led to intra and inter-state conflicts in the continent, increasing its fragility. Significantly, the scramble and competition for these natural resources and access to economic and political power by the ethnic militia warlords and rebel leaders through their militia groups such as the Lord Resistance Army (Uganda), Rwandan Revolutionary Front (RUF), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF). The emergence of these militia groups prolonged violent conflicts and made them unabated. The rebel militia groups were exchanging the oil, diamond and gold for arms, monies and food supplies, in other to sustain the war (Naaanen & Tolani, 2014).

The conflicts in Africa are not totally the doing of the peoples of the continent. They there are push and pull factors that trigger already fragile and strained relations in time past. They include, the legacies of colonialism which instituted the nation-state for exploitation of both human and natural resources for Europe and American advancement as well as the negative 'divide and rule' strategy adopted to keep African peoples down during that period (Davidson, 1992).

The hard truth is that more than 80% of the conflicts in Africa, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) are driven by natural resources caused by uneven distribution of these God-given wealth arising from deep seated ethno-religious, economic and political marginalization of resource-rich communities. For example, among the 14 ongoing United Nations Peacekeeping Operations globally, seven are in Sub-Saharan Africa and almost all the conflicts are resourced driven conflict. Thus, for example, the ongoing conflict in Central African Republic (CAR) (gold and diamond), Democratic Republic of Congo (diamond and cobalt),

Abyei; undisputed region between South-Sudan and Sudan over oil resources etc. In addition, other factors such as climate change, arising from desertification, deforestation, and population explosion leading to competition over depleted natural resources specifically in the Sahel region are potential sources of bloody conflict in Africa.

As noted earlier over 80% of conflicts in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) are driven and sustained by the presence of non-renewable and renewable natural resources as militant groups and rebel leaders scramble for access to mining and international market so as to have resources to wage and sustain the bloody war. According to Thomas Homer Dixon as cited in Maphosa (2012) resource conflict is caused by environmental scarcity. He listed three factors responsible for resource conflict namely;

a) Demand-Induced scarcity: This is caused by an increase in population growth and competition over natural resources. The conflict and full-blown violence in the North-East over grazing space and routes had made the region a humanitarian disaster as human lives and properties worth millions of naira has been destroyed leading to severe food insecurity in the region and across the country. While in the Niger Delta, the conflict is over unequal distribution of oil resources.

b) Supply-Induced Scarcity: This is caused by environmental factors such as climate change in the Sahel region leading to desertification and drought among the Sahel countries. Thus forcing or compelling pastoralists to move Southward to the North-Central, North-west and the Southern part of the country. This has led to a full blown conflict and violence between the Fulani pastoralist or herdsmen and the farmers in the Middle belt and Southern part of the country such as Plateau, Benue, Nassarawa and Southern-Kaduna in the North-West.

c) Structural Scarcity: This is caused by how society is structured in terms of class relations based on Karl Marx theory of conflict. Thus, groups such as the Hausa/Fulani, and the Yoruba's etc. that are not endowed or do not have natural resources (Oil) but by virtue of their access to political power since independence in Nigeria now have access to the wealth or the economic power that comes with it. While those that are bless with the natural resources do not benefit from the wealth that comes with it. They are rather economically excluded, alienated, marginalized and politically dominated. This breed frustration, hatred and eventually lead to a full blown conflict. The conflict in the Niger Delta, Darfur-Sudan, D. R. Congo, Central African Republic etc. are typical example of structural scarcity which has led to unending agitations and cycle of violence and bloodletting.

The United Nations Interventions and the Right to Protect (R2P) Clause.

The United Nations remains the global watch dog responsible for the maintenance of global peace and security as a multilateral collective security agency. Article one of the United Nations Charter clearly asserts that the purpose of the United Nations is:

To maintain international peace and security, and to that end to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to peace and the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace and to bring about by peaceful means and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international dispute or situation which might lead to a breach of the peace (UN Charter)

Again, in the 1990's, after the end of the cold war, the United Nations Agenda for Peace and Security was immediately expanded. The then Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, during his seminal report titled "An Agenda for Peace and Security" outlined and designed a more ambitious and comprehensive role for the United Nations. The report highlight the interconnected roles of the United Nations to peace and security in the post-cold war era. Among the new roles outlined are:

i) Preventive diplomacy: This involves the United Nations in engaging in confidence building measures in conflict spots, fact finding mission, and preventive deployment of United Nations authorized forces.

ii) Peace Making: The UN ensures that hostile or warring parties are brought to agreement through peaceful means or negotiated settlement using the pacific settlement of dispute measures like Mediation, Negotiation, Conciliation and Adjudication. However, when peaceful measures or means failed, then peace enforcement authorized under chapter seven of the UN charter becomes necessary. It must be also noted that that peace enforcement may occur without the consent of the parties.

iii) Peacekeeping: This involves the UN deploying troops such as military, police and civilian personnel to field or conflict areas when peacemaking has failed but with the consent of all parties. This is an example of classical peacekeeping within the UN peace framework.

iv) Post-conflict peace building: This involves the UN developing social, economic and infrastructure to prevent further violence and to consolidate peace.

Again, chapter seven of the United Nations Charter which deals with actions in respect to threats to peace, breaches of the peace and acts of aggression empowers the UN to intervene in the affairs of sovereign states when there is evidence of breach and threat to peace or signs of clear violations of the fundamental rights of the citizens by the state.

Though, Article 2.4 of the United Nations prevents member nations from using threats or force against the territorial integrity or political independence of another state, the UN can still intervene in order to protect human rights. The United Nations further makes a commitment that if the international community suspect that grave violations of rights and acts of genocide either by the state or any other group against a minority population, religious sect or ethnic group, then intervention becomes inevitable. This is the genesis of the "Responsibility to Protect" clause (R2P) by the international community through the umbrella of the United Nations. Most significantly, the United Nations,

General Assembly resolutions of December 2005 at the World submit sanctions that "If National authorities are manifestly failing to protect their population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crime against humanity; and if peaceful means are inadequate, could take collective action through the United Nations Security Council as spelt out in chapter seven of the United Nations charter" (Taylor & Curtis, 2011:320).

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P), was the 2001 report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) made an attempt to resolve the competing tension between the competing claims of sovereignty and human rights by building a new consensus around the principles that should govern the protection of endangered peoples (Alex and Nicolas, 2011, p. 521). The commission argued that states have the primary responsibility of protecting their citizens, and that when they failed or unwilling to protect its citizens or The "principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to act" when a country purposefully terrorizes its citizens. In addition, the report enlarged the duty to prevent humanitarian crises and to establish failed and dictatorial nations, in addition to intervening or responding to them (Alex & Nicholas, 2011, p. 54).

It is regrettable that the United Nations failed to protect the Tutsi and moderate Hutu in the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the Darfur people against the Omar Bashir regime in 2003 even when the Responsibility to Act (R2P) clause has been incorporated in to the United Nations Charter. In the Darfur conflict that started in 2003, the United Nations and the African Union only intervened in 2007 by deploying troops (peacekeepers) to the Darfur region which was belated when the atrocities of genocide, rape, torture had already been committed. The Sudanese government, in 2003 under Omar Bashir in collaboration with the military and the Janjaweed militia committed serious war crimes such as mass murder, rape, forced displacement, use of chemical weapons on defenseless population. The Darfur genocide was the systematic killing of ethnic Darfuri people (Masalit and Zaghawa ethnic groups) which occurred during the ongoing conflict in Western Sudan.

The conflict in Sudan, Darfur region was majorly driven by unequal access to natural resource of oil and gas resources as the commanding height of the economy. As the Darfuris who owns the oil resources are been economically alienated from their God-giving resources and politically marginalized thus, leading to ethnic tension, violence, and conflict just like in the Niger Delta. Though, the International Criminal Court (ICC), indicted the Sudanese government and its appointees for war crimes in the Darfur yet, nobody has been convicted for war crimes portraying the United Nations as a toothless bulldog setting a bad precedent. In 2012, the Syrian government under the Assad regime, used chemical weapons against his own citizen, the Kurdish population during the civil war. This was another pointer to the weakness and divisiveness of the United Nations Security Council and failure of the "Right to Protect" in holding petty dictators accountable as well as protecting civilian population from acts of genocide and human rights abuse from their own government.

Thus, the inability of the United Nations to protect civilian population against their own government or state actors in the face of glaring abuse of fundamental human rights such as rape,

genocide, torture etc. accountable makes mockery of the Right to Protect clause.

The United Nations Peace Intervention in Africa in the 21st Century

Currently, tens of thousands of troops are sent for regionally led missions in nations where civil wars are raging, and over 50,000 troops are sent for UN operations in Africa (Klobucista & Renwick, 20199). Insurgencies and interstate wars have claimed civilian lives and threatened to destabilize neighboring areas. Adam (2021) claims that U.N. Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO), which have seven deployments throughout the African continent, are essential in creating the conditions necessary for a lasting peace following a conflict. It should be mentioned that since 1960, the UN has carried out 57 missions throughout Africa; many of these have produced long-lasting effects, while others have failed to meet their goals and have been condemned for inadequate preparation and poor management. However, a number of studies indicate that about 60% of instances are successful (Source?).

It goes without saying that peacekeeping operations safeguard civilians and lessen some of the harshest effects of conflict, but some security professionals contend that the procedure is frequently seriously flawed. In recent years, there has been a lot of censure and reforms brought about by claims of sexual and other human rights violations by UN forces. However, there is still a lot of disagreement over how to improve the effectiveness of these missions, such as by looking to non-UN efforts to bring peace to areas of Africa that are riven by conflict.

The primary authority for approving and managing international peacekeeping operations is the United Nations. When deploying peacekeepers, it generally adheres to three principles, which include:

i) The main parties to the conflict should consent to the intervention
ii) The peacekeepers should remain impartial but not neutral
iii) The peacekeepers cannot use force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate.

However, it is on record that not all UN peacekeeping operations deployed to war zones had the consent of the warring parties, such as in Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). According to the UN Charter, the Security Council can approve an operation if at least nine of its fifteen members vote in favor of it and if none of the five permanent members—the US, China, Russia, and the UK—veto it. Similarly, when mandates are about to expire, usually every year, the Security Council must decide to extend peacekeeping missions.

As alternatives to conventional UN peace operations, the African Union (AU) and sub-regional blocs like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) launched various missions centered on security and peacekeeping. Nonetheless, the United Nations approved the AU mission and offers financial, logistical, and other assistance for AMISOM in Somalia. Similar to this, the two main ad hoc security efforts in some regions of Africa, such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJT) against Boko Haram and the G5 Sahel's force, were approved by the UN

Security Council and authorized by the African Union (AU), which strengthened their mandates.

Peacekeeping mandates differ depending on the scope and scale of the conflict and on the body or group overseeing the mission. The United Nations deploys peacekeeping forces to protect civilians in armed conflicts, prevent or contain fighting, stabilize post-conflict zones, help implement peace accords, and assist democratic transitions. To achieve these goals, peacekeepers participate in a variety of peacebuilding activities, including:

i)   Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of ex-combatants;
ii)   Landmine removal;
iii) Restoration of the rule of law;
iv)   Protection and promotion of human rights; and,
v)   Electoral assistance.

Significantly, as at September 2019, there were seven U.N. Peacekeeping Operations deployed to Africa in conflict areas, namely:

i)   The U.N. Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA),
ii)   The U.N. Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA),
iii) The U.N. Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA),
iv)   The U.N. Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS),
v)   The U.N. Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO),
vi)   The African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), and
vii) The U.N. Mission for the Organization of a Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO).

Table 1: United Nations Peacekeeping Operation, Approved Budget and Personnel Deployed, since 2019

S/N	UN PEACE OPERATION	YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT	UN APPROVED BUDGET FOR 2019	AUTHORIZED CEILING/MILITARY AND POLICE DEPLOYED
1	Western Sahara (MINURSO)	1991	$57 Million	245/233
2	Mali (MINUSMA)	2013	$1,139 Million	14,600/15,209
3	Central African Republic (CAR) (MINUSCA)	2014	$910 Million	13,679/13,730
4	Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO)	1999	$1,012 Million	16,837/16,316
5	Darfur-Sudan (UNAMID)	2007	$258 Million	6,781/5,550
6	Abyei (UNISFA)	2011	$260 Million	4,175/4,190
7	South-Sudan (UNMISS)	2011	$1,183	16,734/

Source: Constructed by the researcher

The Nature and Dynamics of Conflict in Africa in the 21st Century

It is a truism that the end of the Cold War between the two superpowers; the United States and the Soviet Union, ushered in a new international spirit of cooperation that raised hopes for peace and security in Africa and other continents. Thus, for example, countries that were previously embroiled or engaged in intra-state conflicts, such as Namibia, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and South Africa adopted more democratic systems of government. However, the illusions of a post-cold War peace dividend were shattered as conflicts erupted in virtually all of Africa's sub-regions: Lesotho, Angola, and Zimbabwe in Southern Africa; Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea Bissau in West Africa; Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somalia in the Horn of Africa; Chad, the Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, and Burundi in Central Africa and the Great Lakes region. While Africa's democratization struggles in the early 1990s sought to restore values of democracy and human rights, in countries like Benin, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Congo-Brazzaville, resistance to the process by ruling political and military elites led to "communal" violence in countries like Togo and Kenya (Juma and Mengistu, 2002).

Political exclusion, economic marginalization and income inequalities in the distribution and access to economic and social opportunities have combined with issues of ethnic identity and citizenship has caused genocide in Rwanda, mass murder in Burundi, and civil wars in Liberia, Somalia, and Central African Republic. The crises and conflicts in Africa are also caused by environmental factors such as climate change and global warming which has led to scramble and competition over access to, and use of land resources, and competition for depleted natural resources such as minerals, grazing land, pastures, water, and timbers. This has led to intra and inter-state conflicts in most African states as those who own the resources are been alienated by the government and political elites causing disaffection and frustration among the youths. The frustration, grievances, animosity joblessness and hopelessness later combusted in to violence, armed agitations, militarization of civilian population, and in most cases taking ethnic dimensions. The consequences of these agitations for economic empowerment inclusion is the proliferation of armed militia groups, private armies, illicit trade in drugs, arms etc. in states like Nigeria, Liberia, Sudan, Uganda, Sierra Leon etc.

According to Adam, (2021) of the 57 completed Peacekeeping missions across Africa since the 1960s, many have

delivered lasting results while others have struggled to achieve their objectives and are criticized for poor funding, planning and mismanagement. He equally affirmed that various studies suggest a success rate in the range of 60 percent of all cases. Such successes were witnessed by the United Nations Peacekeeping Operation in Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone. He added that U.N. peacekeeping operations (UNPKO), which have seven deployments on the African continent out of a total of 14 peacekeeping soldiers worldwide, are essential in creating the circumstances necessary for a lasting peace following a conflict. Africa continues to have more peacekeeping missions than any other continent, according to the Council on Foreign Relations. Conflict-stricken nations are increasingly turning to regional organizations like the African Union, ECOWAS, SADC, EU, and others for support, even though experts believe that UN reforms are required to enhance the global peacebuilding effort (Klobucista & Renwick, 2021).

The Dynamics of Conflict in Africa and the Challenges facing the United Nations

i) **Ethnic Cleansing or Mass Killings in the face of the United Nations Peacekeeping:**

One of the major challenges facing the United Nations peacekeeping operation in Africa is the inability of the blue helmet troops to halt ethnic cleansing and hold perpetrators accountable for war crimes against civilian population, including defenseless women and children. Thus, for example the UN mandate in Democratic Republic of Congo known as the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC MONUSCO), established in 2010 that later succeeded the UN Organization Mission in the DRC (MONUC), mandate was to protect civilian population in the ongoing conflict. Among other mandates of the Mission of the mission was to ensure the extension of state authority in Eastern DRC, where multiple armed or separatist groups remain active holding the state hostage. A typical example of state failure or near state collapse like in Somalia and Central African Republic (CAR) in Africa.

Consequently, armed groups have repeatedly massacred civilian population in close proximity or before the very eyes of the United Nations Peace Mission operation camp. This has made various human rights groups protesting and criticizing the inability of the peace mission in protecting civilian population including women and children. The killings of defenseless women and children are clearly against international law of war, but these rebels or armed groups have not been held responsible for war crimes. Though, some scholars have attributed the lack of response and failure to protect the civilian population by the UN mission to factors like logistical challenges, competing tasks, lack of capacity and political will among troop's contributors. Other factors responsible for this non response in the face of war crimes includes; the role of the state in perpetrating violence and their limited or lack of commitment to improving political stability (Luisa, Alexis, & Lauren, 2019).

For instance, the United States supported the establishment of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MONUSCA), a United Nations mandate in the CAR, with the goal of halting additional mass atrocities committed by armed or rebel groups. However, the UN

peacekeeping effort was unable to halt the massacre, negating the purpose of the peace mandate. The BBC reports that the Geneva-based research group "Small Arms Survey" just released a study accusing the UNMISS of failing to maintain neutrality by covertly providing weapons to rebels in the town of Bentiu in 2013. Additionally, the study accused UNMISS of repeatedly underreporting weapons seized from escaping soldiers and giving them to SPLM-IO (Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition) fighters. The study also asserted that the rebels attacked by committing genocides against civilians right after this arms transfer (Oladipo, 2017).

Unfortunately, peacekeepers have received harsh criticism from all throughout the world for their failure to step in when victims most needed them. According to a 2014 assessment by UN internal investigators, troops worldwide only responded to one out of every five threats to civilians and did not use force in fatal attacks. Even if certain reforms have been implemented recently,, the blue helmet failure to protect civilian population has continued. According to the *Economist* the inability of troops to respond to cases of violence and attack against civilian population are caused largely because of limitations placed on the employment of their peacekeepers by nations that provide troops. Once more, an internal U.N. assessment conducted in 2021 found that peacekeeping forces' perceptions of their adherence to ethics and integrity are extremely low, as is their accountability for misconduct. This presents difficulties for the emerging face of conflict in Africa.

ii) **The Role of the Host state**

Another challenges facing the UN mandate on the new landscape of conflict in Africa is the role the host government involved in intra-state conflict plays towards the UN peacekeeping troops. Thus, the behaviour of the host state, either hostile or receptive towards the UN mandate will determine their success. According to Blanchfield etal, (2019, P.9) "A key challenge is how and to what extent, UN Peacekeeping operations should pursue positive working relationships with host governments whose interest may not aligned with international stabilization efforts." It must be noted that under international law, peacekeeping troops or personnel must or may seek the consent of the host government to acquire entry visas to access certain part of the country. As noted earlier United Nations follows three principles for deploying peacekeepers. They are:

a) The main parties to the conflict should consent to the intervention
b) The peacekeepers should remain impartial but not neutral
c) The peacekeepers cannot use force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate.

However, UN peacekeepers have been deployed to war zones where not all the main parties have consented, such as in Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The United Nations charter now guarantees the rights for the UN to intervene in the event of glaring cases of rights abuse and state failure to protect its citizens. The Right to Protect (R2P) as part of new reforms in the United Nations has today, become the golden rule for international engagement in conflict management and prevention of genocides and rights abuses by the state and its agents. Following the widespread international condemnations

over the Rwandan genocide of 1994 where over 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were brutally killed under the watch of the United Nations and World powers like the United States, Russia and the European Union who stood helpless and could not do anything to stop the pogrom. Therefore, Kofi Annan, the UN's secretary general at the time, stated that "impartiality does not and must not mean neutrality in the face of evil" in an attempt to restore the organization's damaged reputation and credibility. By supporting the Brahimi panel report, "The United Nations Peace Operations," published in 2000, he also started sweeping reforms (Nicholas, 2000).

The following fundamental principles and standards for engagement in peacekeeping were published by the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations in 2008 as a follow-up to the Brahimi report's implementation:

Impartiality is crucial to maintain the consent and cooperation of the main parties, but should not be confused as with neutrality or inactivity. A peacekeeping operation must scrupulously avoid activities that might compromise its image of impartiality. Failure to do might comprise its image of impartiality. Failure to do so may undermine the peacekeeping operation's credibility and legitimacy, and may lead to withdrawal of consent for its presence by one or more of the parties (Nicholas, 2019, p. 2).

Therefore, the point is that UN peacekeeping troops that maintain positive working relationship with host governments been accused of perpetrating human rights abuses and war crimes on civilian population; may send a wrong signal of not been neutral, impartial and not trust worthy which might jeopardize the mandate of the Mission. Thus, for example, the UN peacekeeping operation in Central African Republic (CAR), D.R. Congo, and Mali. are mandated to support the extension and preservation of state authorities, even when state authorities are part and parcel of the conflicts and perpetrating heinous crime against civilian population. Another worthy example, was the regime of Joseph Kabila, who was the then president of the Democratic Republic of Congo, between 2001 and 2019. Joseph Kabila was accused of perpetrating violence and brutality against the Congolese people he took an oath to protect. ConsequentlyThe Congolese government under Joseph Kabila and state agents were accused in a report released by the U.S. Department of State of egregious violations of human rights, including rape, torture, arbitrary arrest, sexual assault against women and ethnic minorities, and unexpected disappearances. The Congolese government was also charged in the report with willfully failing to hold state actors responsible for these violations of human rights since they are allowed to act without consequence (Nicholas, 2019).

Oladipo, (2017) a BBC Monitoring African security correspondent in his report assert that in 2016, the UN Peacekeeping mission in South Sudan, came under wide criticism for failing to protect civilian following clashes between government forces and former rebels. A damning internal investigation reveals that the UN peacekeeping mission in the capital, Juba had failed to achieve one of its core mandates, namely "to protect civilians under threat of physical violence with specific protection for women and children". The BBC described the troops' response as chaotic and ineffective Eyewitnesses said

women and girls were raped near UN compounds with no action from peacekeepers. Not far away, foreign aid workers suffered similar sexual violence at their residence. Their case gained much international condemnation, but it is dwarfed by the scale of the atrocities, South-Sudanese civilians have long suffered and experienced. According to the Amnesty International, the United Nation Mission in Central African Republic, MINUSCA was poorly trained and lacks the resources to protect civilian population as more than 75 people including civilians were killed in September 2016 alone, in the northern part of the country during an outbreak of violence (Oladipo, 2017).

Therefore, under these circumstances, of brazen human rights abuse by state agents under the supervision of the UN peacekeeping operation; can the UN mandate be seen to be credible and impartial? Therefore, it leaves a question mark on the credibility of UN peacekeeping troops in tackling the new changing realities of conflict in Africa.

iii) Terrorism and Counterterrorism

Another major challenges facing the UN mandate on the new landscape of conflicts in Africa is the emergence of terrorism. As rebels and Islamist waging war against the state in Mali, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic now claim ties with the Islamic state of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Al-Qaida and carrying out deadly attacks against the state and civilian population, the UN troops watch helplessly in accordance with the principle of neutrality. This is due to the fact that counterterrorism is not within the purview of the UN in conflict zones like the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali. They are hence powerless. According to Blanchfield et al. (2019), policymakers are now questioning what role, if any, the UN peacekeeping mandate should have in confronting transnational terrorism in Africa due to the mandate's incapacity to combat terrorism. Peace operations in D.R. Congo and Mali are therefore seriously hampered by the UN's failure to anticipate terrorism and counterterrorism measures in UN-mandated conflict regions. Likewise, in Nigeria and other Sahelian nations such as Cameroun, Niger, and Chad; the Islamist terror group or rebels like the Boko Haram is now affiliated with the Islamic state of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), thereby posing serious threat to the UN mandate in the region.

iv) Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN Peacekeepers

Another major challenge facing the UN peacekeeping mission or mandate on the new landscape of conflict in Africa is the allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by the UN peacekeepers on women and minors in the conflict ridden zones. Ironically, those the UN Peace mandate is supposed to protect, ended up being the victim of sexual assault, exploitation, and violence. For example, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Central African Republic (CAR) established in 2014 and the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) established in 2010 have been accused of sexual assault and exploitation by Women groups and Civil Society Groups. Protecting civilians who are war victims from violence and exploitation, especially women and children, is the mission of both MINUSCA (CAR) and MONUSCA (DRC).

The allegations of sexual exploitation also made members of the United States Congress to demand for accountability from troopers serving in both MONUSCA and MINUSCA, who had the highest cases of proven allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation (Data, 2015). Off course, it is on record that the United States remain the highest donor or contributing 27.89% to peacekeeping operation. This is followed by China (15.22%), Japan (8.56%), Germany (6.09%) and France (5.61) (Source?)

Though they can contribute to the issue by engaging in sexual assault and other rights violations, peacekeeping missions aid in defending the civilian population against acts of aggression and abuse (Claire & Danilla, 2022). Due to claims of sexual abuse and rape of women and children, Gabonese troops stationed in the Central African Republic were removed. "One notorious and repeated blight on the UN peacekeeping score card has been that of the discipline or the lack of by troops," claims Oladipo (2017, p. 4). In the Central African Republic, a UN investigation between 2014 and 2015 identified 41 troopers, leading to widespread reports of sexual assault of women and children. According to the UN inquiry, the soldiers took advantage of the women and minors material condition by sexually abusing them in exchange for food and clothing. The irony is that the UN having found the soldiers guilty only takes little action against them thereby encouraging more of such deviant behaviours. Similarly, six French soldiers were also found guilty of sexual assault on women and minors but little was also done to serve as a deterrent.

However, as previously mentioned, the UN had launched investigations to address concerns expressed in response to claims of sexual abuse of women and juveniles., very few were prosecuted and sadly none has been convicted, thus denting the image of the UN (Source?). However, the responsibility for prosecution and possible conviction is left with the troops contributing country. Most countries have refused to prosecute their soldiers accused of sexual abuse and other offenses for fear of been blacklisted and denting the image of the country as their soldiers might be rejected by other countries for peace operation.

Conclusively, allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse such as rape, exchanging food and clothes for sex, molestation of minors etc. by troopers who are supposed to protect them from harm remains a major challenge to the United Nations' new landscape of conflict in Africa.

v) Multi-polarity of Actors in African Conflicts:

As noted earlier, Africa continues to have more peacekeeping mission than any other continent, due to varying interest from outside the continent. (Claire & Danielle, 2021, p. 1). Significantly, out of the fourteen (14) ongoing peacekeeping operations worldwide, conducted by the United Nations, seven (7) of such operations are in Africa. Intra and inter-state Conflict in Africa also accounts for about 80% of the UN total budget for peacekeeping operations (Nicholas, 2019). Thus, Africa has become a conflict zone, with attendant consequences for humanitarian disaster on human lives, public infrastructures and economic down turn.

It is on record that during the cold war, which was a struggle for ideological, political and economic dominance by the two super powers (USSR & USA), conflict in the African

continent both intra-state or inter-state conflicts were majorly driven by these external actors with a predetermined interest. Thus, western support for wars in Africa, Asia and Latin America was based on access to natural resources such as oil and gas in places like Nigeria, Iran, Libya, Saudi-Arabia; the blood diamond in Angola, and Sierra Leon; gold in South Africa etc. According to Maphosa, (2012, p. 2), "Natural resources plays key role in triggering and sustaining conflicts". And the resources that triggers most of these conflicts are largely oil and gas, diamond, columbium, tantalite, drugs, gold, grazing pasture, water, livestock etc.

However, since 2017 the trend or pattern of actors that hitherto intervene and escalate African conflicts have changed from the West and Soviet backed faction to a new set of interveners in African conflicts. Ironically, these new set of interveners, unlike the cold war era, have no economic or strategic interest but only promotes destructive and hegemonic interest. According to Wolfram, (2022, p. 1) "the range of external actors in intervening in internal conflicts on the African continent has undergone a noticeable change in recent years". Consequently, three state actors in particular are directly or indirectly involved in intervening in a growing number of African conflicts. These state actors include: The United Arab Emirate (UAE), Turkey, and Russia. He further affirmed that the expanding footprint of such new actors indicates the multipolar disorder that has characterized conflicts and wars in the Middle East, over the past decades. Thus, this multipolar disorder of external actors now characterizes African conflict as the United Arab Emirate, Turkey and Russian's involvement in African conflict are driven by opportunity more than by vital or strategic interest.

Thus, for example, in the Libyan conflict after the defeat and dead of Al-Gadhafi and the battle for power and succession that ensued, external actors like Russia, UAE, and Turkey had played a key role in promoting and sustaining the conflict as financiers, mercenaries and the supply of military hard wares to the different factions where their interest lies. According to Wolfram:

> "The UAE and Egypt started secretly assisting Khalifa Haftar, the leader of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces, in Libya in 2014. Beginning in 2016, Haftar's forces began receiving training and advice from a combination of Russian government troops and private contractors. Haftar's 2019–20 onslaught on Tripoli resulted to a dramatic expansion of UAE and Russian participation in Libya, prompting Turkey to step in and back the beleaguered Government of National Accord. Haftar received assistance from Russian combat forces in addition to UAE drones through the so-called Wagner Group, which is a code name for an unidentified, state-backed network of ex-soldiers and commercial businesses connected to Yevgeny Prigozhin, a close confidant of President Vladimir Putin. Since the battle ended with Haftar's withdrawal in June 2020, the Turkish and Russian presence has continued, along with the employment of Syrian mercenaries by both sides.(Wolfram,2020,pp. 1-2))"

These set of destructive external actors; Turkey and UAE are also visible in the Somalian conflict. Today Somalia is a failed state having one of the worst socio-economic indicators in terms of

Human Development Index (192nd), per capita income ($544), fragility index (110.5), with terrorism, food crisis, hunger, drought, desertification as its distinctive features in the horn region. Between 2010 and 2011 both Turkey and UAE were providing military assistance through training, equipment and mercenary to the various forces; supporting the Transitional Federal government. In Central African Republic, the trio of Russia (Wagner group), Turkey and the United Arab Emirate are also visible with military support, thus sustaining the conflict.

Wolfram, (2020, p. 8), further opined that Multi-polarity is gradually becoming a persistent feature of African conflict and wars and that this has implication for the nature of the warfare, the prospect of conflict resolution as well as the power relations between the West and African states. According to him where state intervenes in conflicts without having vital or strategic interest at stake, such powers will do so by minimizing political and financial cost. Therefore, the diversifying landscape of external actors intervening in African conflict will invariably diminish the prospects of conflict been resolved through multilateral peace effort and diplomatic instruments such as mediation and negotiation.

Summary and conclusion

Africa as a continent, since the beginning of the 21st century has been plagued by a complex and diverse plethora of socio-economic, political and environmental challenges that constitute a clog in the wheel of economic development and political stability. Conclusively, the challenges facing the United Nations peacekeeping operations arising from the new landscape of conflict in Africa is multidimensional and calls for swift ranging reforms. As noted above, among the fourteen ongoing UN peacekeeping operations globally, seven are in Africa. Most of these conflicts are resource-based conflict due to economic alienation, unequal distribution of wealth, competition for power, and climate change arising from resource depletion and population explosion.

Thus, the challenges facing the UN, that is associated with the new landscape of conflicts in the continent include; the role of the host state, terrorism and counterterrorism, sexual abuse, exploitation and human rights violations by peacekeeping troops who are supposed to be protecting the civilian population as victims of war. Other emerging challenges are the inability of peacekeeping troops in protecting civilian population who are victims of war from genocide and state sponsored violence. The multi-polarity of actors involved or intervening in African conflicts such as Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Turkey etc. without any strategic interest but rather a destabilizing role is also of serious concern. This is because the prospect of resolving such conflict through multilateral peacekeeping operation via the United Nations, or regional groups such as the African Union, ECOWAS, AGAD, SADDC etc. and diplomacy becomes a herculean task.

The study therefore, recommends that the UN rules of engagement in conflict area be reformed, so as to ensure that peacekeeping troops who are found guilty of committing heinous crimes such as sexual assault, rape, indiscipline, murder, should be prosecuted by the host state, where the crime was committed.

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