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## The Challenges of Ethiopia's Peacekeeping Operations in the North-South Sudan Conflict: Abyei Since 2011

**Teferi Mengistu Mekonen**

Lecturer, Department of Pedagogy and Morality, College of Social Science, Dire Dawa University, Ethiopia

### **Abstract:**

*The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges of Ethiopia's peacekeeping operations in north- South Sudan conflict in the case of Abyei since 2011 in the maintenance of peace and security in the region. With this intention, the study followed a qualitative methodological approach that deemed necessary for this kind of research which deals with underlying issues that are usually cannot be understood in a quantifiable manner. The data collection process depended up on secondary data. Findings of the study show that the Ethiopia's peacekeeping troops which is called United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) has faced the following major challenges that have impeded the role of Ethiopia's peacekeeping troops. These include Lack of Humanitarian aid, mutual mistrust between the government of Sudan and South Sudan, Logistics problem and the size of the troops compared to the geographical area. For more successful future peacekeeping operation of the force and the sustainable peace of the Abyei region, however, the study suggests that the Ethiopian peace keeping force should work cooperatively with both governments to affirm their commitment to the full implementation of the Abyei referendum, the Government of north and South Sudan should clear their armed forces from conflicting areas, Conduct a thorough and full investigation into human rights abuses committed in Abyei since 2011, United Nations has also expected to increase the number of troops in Abyei , United Nations, African Union, IGAD, individual African countries, US and coordinated international assistance is necessary to help these countries in order to strengthen the security, good governance, and to establish the prevalence of rule of law in the region.*

### **1. Introduction**

The countries constituting the horn of Africa are knit together by a common destiny of alternating conflict and cooperation. It has been a hotbed of crises with local and global dimensions, which originate from state-based as well as society-based conflicts (Mukwaya, 2004). In January 2011 referendum, the South Sudanese overwhelmingly voted for independence making South Sudan Africa's newest nation. However, within few months a flare up of tensions occurred in the bitterly contested Abyeiregion. This region is where both countries are engaged in mutually destructive activities by supporting armed proxies from 22 July 2011 onwards (Kidist, 2014). Subsequently, North and South Sudan signed an agreement in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to fully demilitarize the central region and allow in an Ethiopian peacekeeping force. According to the agreement, signed in Addis Ababa by Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and Southern Sudan President SalvaKiirMaryadit, Northern and Southern forces will be replaced by an Interim Security Force for Abyei (ISFA), composed of Ethiopian troops (Beza, 2014). Following the signing of the peace agreement and on the request of the UN and the AU, Ethiopia deployed a peacekeeping force to ensure border security, including policing a demilitarized border zone that the sides have already agreed to (Beza, 2014). Ethiopia deployed nearly 4,200 troops to Abyei under the banner of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) (Kidist, 2014).

Ethiopia as a member of UN, AU and IGAD continues playing a leading role to find a political solution to the horn of Africa particularly in North- South Sudan conflict in the case of Abyei (Kidist, 2014). Additionally, different literatures focus on the Ethiopia's peace keeping force' past and present practices in dealing with continental peace and global level in general (Haile Araya, 2006; Emmanuel Nikolas, 2014; KidistMulugeta, 2014). However, as far as the researcher's knowledge is concerned, there is no research conducted that identify the challenges of Ethiopian peacekeeping mission in maintaining peace and security in the Abyei region sufficiently. Therefore, it is reasonable to assess the challenges of Ethiopia's peacekeeping operations in the north-South Sudan conflict in the case of Abyei since 2011. Accordingly, this research was conducted to answer the following basic research questions:

- What were the causes of conflict in Abyei?
- What was the role of Ethiopia in peace keeping operation in Abyei region?
- What were the challenges that face Ethiopia in peace keeping operations in Abyei?

In this research, with the intention to assess the challenges of Ethiopia's peacekeeping operations in the north-South Sudan conflict in the case of Abyei since 2011, the result of the study is significant for different researchers, analysts, and policy makers in formulating a framework to overcome the challenges of peacekeepers in successful future peacekeeping mission. It also helps to raise the skill or technique of peace keeping operation. Furthermore; it is hoped that this finding could stimulate further research in the field of peacekeeping operations.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The descriptive survey research design was employed in the study and the qualitative method was used whose data collection and analysis techniques involve describing and contextualizing the problem in view of the study. This research methodology is employed to describe a set of non-statistical inquiry techniques. Therefore, qualitative approach was selected as pertinent in order to grasp a detailed understanding of the issue (in order to explain Ethiopia's role in peace keeping operations of Abyei and challenges that viewed after peace keeping operations). For data collection, this study was relied on secondary data sources like books, media publications, scholars' articles.

Therefore, this study was relied on the appropriate secondary sources and official documents to elicit pertinent information. As a method of analysis, the data which was collected from the above sources was utilized by using descriptive analysis in order to explain the theme of the study and to make a valid conclusion.

## 3. Results and Discussion

While a 2011 referendum resulted in the independence of South Sudan, the Abyei area, which lies along the border of Sudan and South Sudan, remains contested. Due to the presence of oil in the region, Abyei is of significant economic value to both countries. The situation is further exacerbated by a competition for resources; rival ethnic groups – the NgokDinka from the South and the Misseriya from the North – claim ownership of the land and have been the driving force behind violence in the region for the past several years (UN, 2014). The issues of identity and attachments to the land are important in explaining the way the two conflicting groups of Abyei have expressed their territorial identities and institutional allegiances. Natural resources are also an important source conflict in the region. In the literature, both scarcity and abundance of natural resources are linked to violent conflicts in Abyei. It has an abundance of renewable natural resources that should be sufficient for the daily survival of both groups. However, the geographical distribution of renewable resources and the unequal ability to access them have contributed to the scarcity of water and grazing land to one group. Oil explorations have heightened such scarcity. Furthermore, the system of revenue allocation is likely to contribute to increased conflicts in the area (Muna, 2010).

External actors are determined to support the parties and mediator to achieve mediated settlement that concludes the essence of intervention. It is imperative to stress on the nature of third party's intervention as "Peace making intervention vary greatly and are conducted by numerous kinds of interveners" (Kriesberg, 2012).

Since UNMIS' mandate ended in July 2011 a new peacekeeping force has been present in Abyei, the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). Like UNMIS, UNISFA also has a mandate to protect civilians under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and on 14 December 2011 its mandate was expanded to include additional tasks related to the de-militarization of Abyei. It is imperative that UNISFA be given the necessary resources to enable it to fulfill its mandate and ensure effective protection for the civilians in Abyei (Amnesty international, 2011). From 22 July 2011, onwards, Ethiopia deployed nearly 4,200 troops to Abyei under the name of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). The UN mission is mandated to demilitarize Abyei and monitor peace. The peace keeping mission in Abyei is unique in the history of the UN, as it is entirely composed of troops from one state, Ethiopia. An Ethiopian senior general is also providing both the political and military leadership of the mission (Kidist, 2014). Ethiopia's contribution to easing tensions between the two Sudanese is viewed as a very positive development. Nonetheless, both parties are still unable to agree on the issue of Abyei, and the disputed borders are not yet demarcated. In ensuring this, Ethiopia's continued constructive engagement is vital (ibid).

In this research attempt was made to investigate the Challenges of Ethiopia in Peacekeeping Operation in Abyei since 2011. Accordingly, the study revealed the following results.

### 3.1. Lack of Humanitarian Aid

With a lack of health facilities, precarious nutrition levels, and so large a population of IDPs, the need for humanitarian assistance in Abyei is acute. This humanitarian crisis renders UNISFA's work all the more important (UN, 2014). One potential obstacle for addressing humanitarian needs is the lack of clarity over whether Sudan or South Sudan—or both—controls humanitarian access into the area, given Abyei's contested status between the two countries and due to Sudanese government restrictions and growing insecurity, aid workers have been unable to deliver promised assistance to communities in the northern part of the Abyei region. Although the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee (AJOC) has issued an appeal to the humanitarian community highlighting the urgent needs of the returning population and called on the two presidents to form an inter-governmental task force "to ensure expeditious and coordinated delivery of humanitarian assistance to the affected populations in Abyei," no decision or agreement has been made between the Juba and Khartoum governments that clarifies, in particular, whether one or both governments are able to issue visas for access to the area. In the current political environment, such a decision may not be feasible, leaving uncertain the level of humanitarian access into Abyei going forward and vulnerable to the politics surrounding Abyei's final status (Hsiao, 2012)

Therefore, the rate of return remains relatively low, both due to the perceived insecurity and to the lack of access to basic services north of the river; these are provided for by international organizations and NGOs further south. So far there has been reluctance amongst these organizations to expand schooling, food support and medical assistance to the north (Spittaels and Weyns, 2014).

### 3.2. Mutual Mistrust between the Government of Sudan and South Sudan

The 20 June 2011 agreement, which was the prelude to the establishment of UNISFA, stipulated that both sides would withdraw their respective forces and allow an interim Sudan-South Sudan Destruction and Desolation in Abyei Ethiopian peacekeeping force into Abyei. However, in Amnesty international report to the UN Security Council the UN Secretary-General noted that as of 23 November,

2011 Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Sudanese police forces remained in Abyei and that, while the South Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) had redeployed from Abyei as of 9 November, South Sudanese Police Service (SSPS) and individual SPLA members remained in the area. With the two sides having so far failed to resolve their differences, and in the absence of guarantees that the sides will be made to honour their commitments to implement agreed measures to ensure security in the area, it has remained impossible for the displaced population to return to Abyei (Amnesty international, 2011). In the face of such a lack of cooperation, the charge of maintaining peace and stability, as well as protecting the civilians of Abyei, rests even more squarely on the shoulders of the UNISFA peacekeepers (UN, 2014).

### 3.3. Logistics Problem

Effective logistic support is crucial to enabling the civilian, military and police personnel deployed in complex peace operations to fulfill their mandates. It is also critical for the health and safety of deployed personnel, and for the operation's capacity to provide support to other actors, including the host nation government and humanitarian organizations. Moreover, the manner in which logistic support is provided can affect the host nation, potentially either supporting the peace operation's objectives or undermining them (Coleman, 2014). The Government of the Sudan has not yet formalized the transfer of the Kadugli logistics base from UNMIS to UNISFA. However, with the liquidation of UNMIS, UNISFA has taken over responsibility for guarding the camp and United Nations assets and has taken possession of fuel infrastructure and reserve stocks. During the reporting period, UNISFA began receiving United Nations-Owned- Equipment from UNMIS. On 21 October, approval was granted for 280 containers to move from El Obeid to Kadugli. However, movement of the containers remains delayed by local authorities. Meanwhile, delivery of fresh rations is being conducted through Kenya and Mombasa by a UNISFA contractor, as the Government of the Sudan has not cleared rations through Port Sudan (UN, 2011).

Moreover, the Government of Sudan has repeatedly failed to cooperate with international peacekeepers and humanitarian workers, denying them freedom of movement and access, refusing entry visas for desperately needed personnel, blocking the delivery of critical logistics support. Despite logistical problems, Ethiopian troops were able to operate successfully and to communicate effectively with the locals says a respondent working with the peacekeeping mission (EIIPD and ISS, 2011).

### 3.4. Inadequate Number of the Troops Compared to the geographic Area

Sudan's north-south boundary is one of the longest between neighboring African countries ("Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement"). The main flashpoint of this aspect of the dispute is Abyei, an oil-rich enclave that encompasses an area of about 10,460 square kilometers (Moulid, 2011). According to the UNSC Resolution 1990, drafted and championed by the United States, provided for the deployment of up to 4,250 peacekeepers to provide security and protect civilians under imminent threat of violence in the disputed border region (UN, 2014). Its full complement makes it one of the biggest missions in terms of the geographic area covered under a UN peacekeeping mission: on an average 1 Ethiopian peacekeeper per 2.3 square kilometers (Mehari, 2011).

The size of the troops compared to the geographic area that it is supposed to cover, the unpredictability of the actions of North Sudanese military, particularly aerial bombardment, the politicization and militarization of the border areas in preparation to any referendum that may be conducted to determine the fate of disputed areas and the viability of the GoSS to provide stability and security in the border areas makes it too challenge full (Ibid). Therefore, compared to the geographic size of such an area, and its complexity, the mission is very limited (EIIPD and ISS, 2011).

## 4. Conclusions

The result of the study shows that the Horn of Africa sub-region where both norths -South Sudan entered to tensions in Abyei region has been a hotbed of crises between the north and South Sudan governments which is caused by natural resources, citizenship and migration, and ethnicity. This severely hinders the sustainable security of the people and the overall macroeconomic development of the region. Abyei has thus always been seen as the most dangerous flashpoint for large-scale violence between north and South Sudan.

Although, Ethiopian peace keeping mission has made a significant contribution for the maintenance of regional peace, security and stability in the region, some challenges are considerable which contributed for the hindrance of the peacekeeping mission in the region. The first challenge that the Ethiopian peacekeeping force faced was lack of humanitarian aid. This is due to the lack of clarity over whether north Sudan or South Sudan—or both—controls humanitarian access into the area, given Abyei's contested status between the two countries as a result of the continued instability and because of insecurity of the region, aid workers unable to deliver promised assistance to communities in the region. The other prominent challenge to the operation of Ethiopian peace keeping force was the mutual mistrust between the two countries in the region namely, north Sudan and south Sudan. Although the two countries have made agreement to withdraw their troops from Abyei, they constantly compete over oil reach areas, which has dragged back the peace keeping mission as well as smooth running of UNISFA. This mistrust of the two countries inculcates conflicts in the region. States of the region are devastated by several interstate and intrastate conflicts. More importantly, they are too busy with internal conflicts. The sum of these problems affected the capacity and development of UNISFA by diverting resources to the internal problems and to the prevailing peace support operations in the region. Logistics problem is a challenge to Ethiopia's peace keeping operation in Abyei. This means that the country unable to support UNISFA financially, as a result of which, Ethiopia's peace keeping troops are dependent on the support of UN thereby undermining institutional progress. The evidently observed logistics problems further led the institution to be weak in terms of logistics that are crucial to maintain and equip the troops. The size of the troops compared to the geographic area is another challenge. The small number of the troops compared to the geographic area has hindered

the effort of creating effective and genuine mission. Having such imbalances, especially with the mission's mandate given is very difficult in the field operation thereby undermining the effective operation of the peace keeping mission.

Accordingly, it would be logical to recommend that the Ethiopian peace keeping force should work cooperatively with both governments to affirm their commitment to the full implementation of the Abyei referendum is a gate way for maintaining peace and stability in the region. The Government of north and South Sudan should ensure that their armed forces such as SAF and SPLA respectively do not undertake any action which might make civilians vulnerable to attacks or otherwise endanger their safety. This facilitates the voluntary return of displaced people to Abyei and improves the safety and security of both countries population. Conduct a thorough and full investigation into human rights abuses committed in Abyei since 2011, including allegations of killings of civilians and the burning and looting of civilian property, and other violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. This requires the willingness of both governments to carry out independent and impartial investigations into allegations of attacks against civilians and their properties by government forces and backed militias and bring to justice, in accordance with international standards, those found to be responsible for such acts, including those in command positions who failed to prevent them. This paves a way to provide reparation for the victims of human rights abuses committed by members of SAF or SPLA -backed militias and verify effective human rights. United Nations has also expected to increase the number of troops in Abyei and provide necessary resources and logistical assistance for UNISFA so as to increase the effectiveness the Ethiopian peacekeeping operations. This strengthens the potential of UNISFA to create the necessary security conditions for the prompt return to Abyei of the displaced population. United Nations, African Union, IGAD, individual African countries, US and coordinated international assistance is necessary to help these countries in order to strengthen the security, good governance, and to establish the prevalence of rule of law. If they are fails to address the challenges arising from conflict-affected areas, it will inevitably have to deal with the much costlier international security and humanitarian challenges arising from them. The case of Abyei is particularly pertinent because of the area's proximity to horn of African multifaceted problems. Therefore, this is important for them to strengthen the potential of African peacekeeping and peace building capacities by means of greater bilateral cooperation between Ethiopia and the AU member states.

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