Military Integration as an Integral Part of Peacebuilding: The Rwandan Example

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1. Introduction

This seminar being held today the 7th April coincides with the 17th Anniversary of the 1994 Tutsi Genocide. The genocide represented failure of international intervention when it should have mattered.

I note that this seminar will address peace support capacities within Africa, while exploring how they are being integrated into global systems and whether they are redefining norms of intervention on the continent. This paper will demonstrate peace support capacities within Africa, taking the example of peacebuilding in Rwanda. It is possible that peacebuilding lessons learnt in Rwanda could be applicable in post-conflict Africa and elsewhere globally.

The United Nations defines peacebuilding as efforts at capacity building, reconciliation and societal transformation. Peacebuilding, in this view, is a long-term process that occurs after violent conflict has slowed or stopped.

On the other hand, the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence describes peace-building as political, economic, social and military measures designed to strengthen political settlements, in order to redress the causes of conflict.1

Various analyses2 recognise the ad hoc nature of international responses to armed conflict and state failure. This has led to the embrace of the broader definition of peace-building enshrined in the UK Ministry of Defence approach, taking into consideration that peace-building efforts must sometimes be undertaken before conflict has ended.

Peace-building is thus synonymous with ‘stabilization’, the aim being to support countries emerging from conflict by preventing or reducing violence, protecting people and key institutions, promoting political processes which lead to greater stability, and preparing for longer-term, non-violent politics and development.

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1 See Tswalu Protocol on Peace Building, January 2008. The Tswalu Protocol articulates a consensus derived from the experience of a group of civilian and military professionals, academics, individual organisations, government departments and heads of state who have been at the epicentre of peacekeeping and peace-building missions.

2 Ibid
2. Military Integration as an Integral Part of Peacebuilding

Conflict and its effects will continue to be a reality in Africa for the foreseeable future, unless effective strategies are employed to ensure security and stability in many countries on the continent. Rwanda has adopted a peacebuilding model spearheaded by the military that has laid the foundation in a process that has ensured stability and national development.

The peacebuilding process in the context of the Rwanda Defence Forces (RDF) may be appreciated in light of developments in post-Genocide Rwanda. However, the RDF integration that preceded the peacebuilding was an already established practice by the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA) during its struggle for Rwandan inclusivity and as a war strategy to weaken the enemy morale.

In the Rwandan case, one method of reaching lasting peace was to ensure participation by all competing factions in a new government, hence the establishment of the Government of National Unity after the genocide.

Another aspect of ensuring lasting peace was the full integration of the ex-military into the new national army. Thus, the Rwanda military integration provided the example of an effective peacebuilding process that would be replicated elsewhere.

Basically there are three models of military integration as conflict management strategies. The first is the consent-based model, which is based on comprehensive negotiated settlement of conflict between two parties conducted under third party supervision. The government forces may absorb guerrilla forces or may merge the two warring factions to form a single national force. It is important to note that the peacebuilding is usually conducted after cessation of hostilities though the security situation may remain fragile.

The second model is complete demobilization where the government decides to downsize its military through the normal channels of peacebuilding but does not include former enemy combatants in its forces. Examples include the 1991 Ethiopia complete demobilization of the former government forces under the DERG after the defeat of Mengistu Haille Mariam.

The third is the coercive model of peacebuilding, which involves forced disarmament of insurgents and is usually carried out by external intervention under a United Nations mandate. An example of this is the failed forced disarmament of Somali warring factions in 1993.

3. The Rwandan Model of Peacebuilding

Rwanda’s model of peacebuilding is based on consent, where ex-combatants were fully integrated in the spirit of the 1993 Arusha Peace Agreement between the RPF and the Government of Rwanda. Protocol III of the Agreement provided for integration of the RPA into the Forces Armées Rwandaises (FAR).
Unlike in the classic Consent Model, RDF integration was a continuous process, that is, before, during and after cessation of hostilities. The Rwanda model was effected through the traditional concept of Ingando (solidarity camps). The Ingando in Kinyarwanda means a military encampment or assembly area (RV) where the troops traditionally received their final briefing while readying for a military expedition abroad. The briefing included, among others, re-organisation of the troops and allotment of missions and tasks.

In such gatherings, the individuals were reminded to subject their interests to the national ideal and give Rwanda their all. This meant that whatever differences one may have, the national interests always prevailed since the nation of Rwanda is bigger than any one individual and ensured prosperity for all. That was the idea behind the institution of Ingando.

The objectives of the Ingando is to help the participants, who today also include members of the greater society, i.e., students, grassroots leaders, opinion leaders, teachers, released prisoners, etc, overcome mutual fear and suspicion, and temptation to revenge; talk about the history of the conflict; heal the wounds of hatred; accept responsibility for any harm done to each other; demystify negative perceptions of each other; collective ownership of the tragedy that resulted from the conflict; and, agree on what the future portends for them.

Ingando employs the concept of problem solving workshops (PSW), as a participatory conflict management strategy. Problem-solving workshops are designed as the best method through which a protracted conflict such as Rwanda’s may find sustainable resolution. PSW encourage the parties to analyse their conflict, its causes, the parties’ attitudes towards each other, and their post-conflict relationship.

Steps taken in Ingando

The first step is to help the ex-combatants and the RDF to unburden themselves emotionally. This can be achieved by allowing them to talk about the conflict and its history. What the parties feel about the conflict and about each other is an important barrier that must first be removed. When the parties are not able to first talk about the conflict and their feelings about it, they will never be able to talk about mutual solutions and the future. The command’s challenge is to ensure an atmosphere in which the parties get to know each other and respect each other’s dignity as persons at all times.

The second step is joint military redeployment of the former adversaries. This deployment provides further opportunity for the participants to continue learning about the conflict and further facilitate bonding between the troops through demystification of any differences and misperceptions they may harbour about each other. An example of joint deployment may be provided by the war in DRC in 1998-2002, after about 39,200 were integrated in the RPA. After their tour of duty in the DRC, or while on leave, the break enabled the ex-combatants to return to their communities. While on leave they influenced their communities with their example of being fully integrated.
In the third step, the RDF continuously facilitates exploratory dialogue through the office of the Civil-Military Coordination Office (J5) at the RDF Headquarters. Here the J5 is more analytical and the participants are encouraged to analyze their conflict as a mutual problem. This process includes analyzing why the conflict began; why each reacted to it the way they did; and, coming to terms with their mutual losses and responsibilities. The J5 ensures that no blame is apportioned. This stage can be emotional but is crucial and must be passed through, because in the end this ensures a win/win solution.

The fourth stage is when the integrated ex-combatants meet and re-evaluate the whole process. In their testimonies they may admit to have been convinced that there is a way out mutually, developed doubts about the process, or also admit to have received contradictory reactions from their constituencies about the process.

During the November 2006 International peacebuilding Course at the RMA Nyakinama where he was a guest speaker, Maj. Gen. Paul Rwarakabije (Ex-Commander FDLR), who is now integrated in the RDF and is a commissioner in the RDRC, provided an example of successful integration. His testimony was fostered on the conviction that there was a way out of the conflict.

Participation in Ingando recognizes the dignity and humanity of the participants as equal Rwandans. Irrespective of their roles in the Rwandan conflict, the Ingando form the starting point to conflict resolution.

Ingandos were initially meant for integrating ex-combatants into the national army and society during and after the Rwandan liberation war. This entailed mixing the ex-FAR and the RPA officers and men and give them an opportunity to talk about the Rwandan conflict.

The integration of the ex-FAR and militias continues to-date. Between 1995 and 1997, a total of 10,500 ex-FAR officers and men were integrated in the RPA. And between 1998 and 2002 a total of 39,200 ex-FAR and militia were integrated in the RPA.

Immediate security dividends from the Rwanda peacebuilding in 1997 was the transformation of the counter-insurgency strategy into a political and social effort that would in a short time break the back of the ex-FAR and militia insurgents operative in and out of the country. The soldiers got integrated and became stakeholders as responsible citizens and breadwinners for their families.

The peacebuilding pay-offs include, among others, promoting stability and initial reconciliation between conflicting parties. In the case of the RDF the ex-combatants moved from being tools of violence into being economic assets, i.e., war resources were channeled into socio-economic development. The integrated ex-combatants allow for human capital development in their skills and talents, thus providing suitable conditions for societal reconciliation by becoming valuable stakeholders. Peacebuilding also
becomes a facilitator for military professionalism, which enhances effectiveness and healthy civil-military relations and societal reconciliation.

4. Rwandan Peacebuilding and Local Ownership

Peacebuilding demands local ownership, of which Rwanda adopted the following six-step strategy, namely, instituting a campaign plan, establishing coherence, taking the lead, building capacity, Economic Assessment and Aid Focus and Priorities, and Information and Messaging.

*Campaign Plan:* Immediate post-genocide Rwanda had parameters of a failed state – it was on its death bed. To recap on these parameters, Rwanda was in utter anarchy. Over one million Rwandans were killed and the rest of the population were displaced. Over 2.5 million people had sought refuge in neighbouring countries, and many more – about 3.5 million – were internally displaced.

There were countless numbers of orphans, widows, thousands of handicapped people and generally a very vulnerable and traumatised population.

Law and order had completely broken down. Large scale atrocities were still going on in parts of the country. All national law enforcement agencies and judicial institutions had ceased to exist and the system of administration of justice had come to a complete standstill.

Social and economic infrastructure was in a state of collapse. All economic indicators showed a desperate situation, with the inflation standing at close to 1000 percent, and most economic activity having ground to a complete halt.

Neither schools nor hospitals were functioning. The civil service had been decimated or its membership had fled into exile.

A cloud of insecurity loomed over Rwanda, as the former soldiers and the militia re-organised themselves, intent on continuing their genocidal campaign with the support of the then Zaire, now Democratic Republic of Congo.

Given the above scenario, Rwanda’s “campaign plan” was to resuscitate the nation through mobilizing all available resources through the Government of National Unity. The first strategy was to own the process as a nation through inclusivity. The realization was also that any strategy is dynamic because it is dictated by the realities on the ground.

Through consensus a deliberate effort was made to establish new national institutions, including the military. The argument was to stay focused despite the continuing polarization of the society resulting from the genocide if Rwanda was to find its feet again.
Establishing Coherence: In Rwanda there was no victor nor vanquished. By the very act of genocide, all Rwandans lost. It was up to the Rwandan leadership to turn this around and make a win-win situation for all in order to establish operational coherence at all levels of national life. This remains no mean challenge as the country continues to take stock of its tragedy while trying to heal its body-politic and usher in peace and security that will ensure continued development.

Lead Nations: The Rwandan nation took the lead and the challenge was to manage and regulate the “swarm” of international partners in form of International and local NGOs, agencies, etc. Rwanda was very uncompromising on the lead role to the extent that in 1995-'96 the government had to ask UNAMIR II to wind up and “leave sooner than later”. UNAMIR II was only perpetuating dependency on the international community while undermining the government’s legitimacy by insisting people remain in IDP camps.

Building Capacity: Given the near-failed state of Rwanda the first thing was to ensure security by integrating and forming a coherent national defense force. From the ex-combatants and the demobilized soldiers a new police force was formed to take over the national policing duties from the military. The ex-combatants also went on to form the local defense units in their respective areas of origin.

Rwanda’s security was therefore locally owned. The policy of integrating the military and the militia into a coherent force served as a role model for the greater society that had been polarized and divided. With security in place it was easier to start on building capacity in all the other sectors of the nation.

Economic Assessment and Aid Focus and Priorities: As already observed Rwanda was socio-economically on its knees with the cumulative decline in GDP having passed the 60% mark by 1994. Despite this, immediately after the genocide aid was not forthcoming from the international community until the end of 1996 when donors under the Geneva Conference for Rwanda pledged over US$600 million that would be managed under a trust fund by the UNDP. Unfortunately, the UNDP wanted to take over the planning function from the government by determining development priorities which came with conditionalities to access those funds.

Additionally, the UNHCR returned from the Congo in 1996-'97 with a hefty balance on their relief account (US$1.2b) that by far exceeded the national budget (US$500m) of Rwanda. These UN agencies undermined the legitimacy of the government by having more resources than the national treasury, which they flouted. At one point cabinet ministers would line up at the UNHCR office seeking funds for their ministerial projects without going through the national treasury. This compromised national priorities in economic development.

Information and Messaging: Rwanda has used a strategic messaging campaign as an active participant and partner in peace-building efforts in Africa. Rwanda is currently
involved in almost all regional peace initiatives, including the East African Standby Force.

The country has participated in peace keeping in Sudan – in Darfur with the United Nations and African Union peace keeping effort - UNAMID, and in Southern Sudan with the United Nations peace keeping initiative. Rwanda participated in peace keeping in Comoros as well as in Liberia.

Unrelenting engagement with fellow Africans and the international community for sustainable peace and improved developmental results remains at the core of Rwanda’s foreign policy agenda.

5. Peacebuilding Lessons from Rwanda

Peacebuilding cannot be assembled elsewhere. It must be a homegrown process. Local ownership is paramount because locals must take full responsibility as they are the primary stakeholders.

Rwanda’s military and social integration process has shown that peacebuilding is positive-sum game; there are neither spoilers nor losers. Everybody is a winning stakeholder in the post-conflict scenario.

You must build local capacity especially in security and defence in order to usher in peace and development. The capacity built should give you courage to say “no” to what is wrong and defend what is right in the eyes of a paternalistic and patronizing international community.

6. Conclusion

In it is worth noting that there was limited room for scapegoating, or externalizing the cause or the aftermath of the tragedy. It behoove Rwandans to own the problem collectively. It is also worth mentioning that peacebuilding entails restoration of the dignity to the people and not a favour citizens should expect from anybody. As President Kagame would say, “we owe it to ourselves.”

I began this presentation by recalling the date of commemoration of the Tutsi genocide. Children born before that date under 17 years old this year. These youngsters will be participating in the under-17 football World Cup this year in Mexico. They will be participating as Rwandans – not Hutu or Tusti. The fact that they be participating in the national football team based on ability and merit alone, demonstrates what has been achieved in Rwanda. They will be participating as Team Rwanda. This is the value that has been inculcated in all areas of development among the population, as what will be achieved individually and nationally for posterity can only be possible when all citizens are working together as Team Rwanda. It must always be recalled that peace and security are development.