

SPMAGTF-Africa

The role Marines can play in conflict management

by Hamid Lellou

Although conflicts have existed since the dawn of humanity, conflict resolution as an institutional tool for managing global conflicts is a recent field of practice. An acronym that is frequently used when talking about post-conflict areas is DDR—disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. Disarmament and demobilization are related to removing weapons from combatants and combatants from military structures through negotiations and coordination—two areas that the U.S. state department, the United Nations, and the U.S. military have been successful in accomplishing. However, the third component, reintegration, which involves the successful return of combatants and refugees to a stable society, has many moving parts and has had few long-lasting success stories. Although conflict resolution is the primary goal, there is no resolved conflict if there is no social justice among the beneficiaries or fair opportunities that follow. Violent conflicts cannot be prevented from reoccurring without security, jobs, and the mitigation of the dysfunction that initiated the situation. Therefore, resolved conflicts can only be sustained when accompanied by social justice and enterprise opportunities. This article aims to identify areas in which SPMAGTF-AF may increase success through its different sets of missions, crisis response, capacity building, and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) by applying an interdisciplinary approach to conflict management through three key areas: conflict resolution, social justice and human rights, and social innovation and enterprise.

Large-scale conflicts have existed for centuries now, so why are those solving and managing them still struggling to find common ground or a model to ad-

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SPMAGTF-CR-AF provided training for military forces in Uganda during 2017. (Photo by LCpl Patrick Osino.)

equately resolve them? Each conflict is different and must be addressed within its context. This requires an interdisciplinary approach. The term interdisciplinary, which is the process of integrating several disciplines to solve a complex problem, is a new concept to all fields of study. This concept needs to mature before it can have a strong and positive impact on this field. However, given that SPMAGTF-AF already incorporates multiple disciplines into its different mission components, including crisis response, capacity building, and HA/DR, it is prepared and has a baseline for how to proceed. By applying

the interdisciplinary study of conflict management, social justice, and entrepreneurship disciplines to its existing framework, SPMAGTF-AF can work to address and tackle root problems rather than scratching the surface and patching symptoms, particularly during its capacity building and HA/DR missions.

The DDR model was adopted by the international community in 1989, at the end of Cold War. This program was designed to disband the defeated enemy forces and reintegrate ex-combatants.¹ Since then, the world has had numerous examples of conflicts in which this

methodology has been used. Per an independent study in January 2000 led by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, over half of the countries in Africa were affected by conflict, and the three main causes to conflicts in the continent were: 1) overwhelming colonialism, 2) the Cold War, which created a system of state client and corruption, and 3) the new world order. Almost three decades after the end of the Cold War, the same variants leading to conflicts remain intact. Colonialism has become neo-colonialism, where developed countries control Africa economically because of their technological advances.² Thus, African resources still don't benefit the African people. U.N. agencies and other humanitarian organizations are overwhelmed with these pervasive conflicts. Meanwhile, financial resources are getting scarce and people are getting impatient.³

To bring about the dire reform needed to end conflict, we need ingenuity. Marines, through SPMAGTF-AF, can achieve true understanding of the interdisciplinary approach and be the drive belt that connects all the areas with the need to resolve conflicts. However, there is a common key element that Marines need to know and use to connect all those disciplines: cross-cultural competency. Successful Marines imperatively need to consider the different human components and dynamics of the conflict: age, ethnicity, gender, language, nationality, religion, emotions, and narratives. In his *Handbook Of International Peacebuilding: In the Eye of the Storm*, conflict management expert Jean Paul Lederach answers the question, "What do I need to know about culture?" with:

Culture is about the very process by which meaning is constructed and negotiated. You will constantly be interacting with the subtle and not-so-subtle meanings and values attached to the content of history of the conflict, social interactive pattern of people, and responses to and interaction with your very methodologies in all the work you do.⁴

There is no better example of this than the sustainably resolved conflict in Rwanda. This country has been

successfully recovering from the 1994 genocide which left more than 800,000 people dead. The recovery of Rwanda is one of the best examples pointing to the need for conflict resolution reform. Indeed, Rwanda owes its success not to DDR but to the Rwandan DDRI (disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and integration) program, commonly known in Rwanda as "Ingando." Ingando is

a reconciliation tool that transforms negative perceptions that cause ethnic hatred; mitigates conflict influence factors; and manages defeat, shame, and remorse on the part of the loser. Therefore, DDRI programs that integrate a sensitization program and exit strategy lead to sustainable stability and reconciliation.⁵

Rwandan people have been successfully dealing with their own healing almost without the help of the U.N. The integration in DDRI included a local touch to the healing. Rwandan culture is unique in a sense that forgiveness is one of its essential components. This reinforces the fundamental need for conflict resolution and for DDR practitioners to have cross-cultural competency. The forgiveness process is not an easy exercise, as shown in a yearlong emphasis on the forgiveness and reconciliation program led by Dr. Geoffrey W. Sutton, a professor of psychology. In his paper, "Rwanda Remembered: Three Faces of Forgiveness and Reconciliation," he describes this process and its impact on the victims and the perpetrators.⁶ A similar, often overlooked element in justice is stressed in the *Journal of Transnational Justice*: the importance of knowing the truth.⁷ Peace cannot be sustained if this element is ignored by the practitioners for political or pseudo-peace convenience. As some transnational justice research has shown,

the right to truth stems from the need of victims and relatives of the missing to know the fate of their loved ones, and has since been developed to apply to the perpetration of gross human rights violations more generally.⁸

In Rwanda, once the healing process began, NGOs (nongovernmental

organizations) working on enterprise development within the private sector followed. A study led by Ans Kolk, entitled "Hybrid Business Models for Peace and Reconciliation," highlights the

different degrees of hybridity of a range of organizations operating in a (post-) conflict region. It shows how 53 organizations in between the non-profit/for-profit extremes pursue different combinations of social and economic goals, maintain and develop relationships with stakeholders, and interact progressively with markets and institutions.⁹

Although Rwanda has refused foreign interference in its recovery and development, outside organizations such as the World Economic Forum have admitted that Rwanda's GDP growth reached around eight percent per year between 2001 and 2014, and the International Monetary Fund expects its economy to continue to grow for the next decade.¹⁰ SPMAGTF-AF's capacity building section may want to dedicate part of its funds to support local small business initiatives, which would help with the reintegration, or integration, of some former fighters.

Unfortunately, the same thing cannot be said about the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, and other places in Africa and elsewhere. These countries continue to suffer and undergo sustained challenges because of conflicts lasting for at least the last two decades. The U.N. is the leading conflict institution that oversees all DDR projects except that in Rwanda. Recognizing the U.N.'s shortfalls, Alain Le Roy, Under-Secretary-General for their Peacekeeping Operations, grants that

as with the larger challenges of peacekeeping, in which DDR plays an integral part, the issues have become more complex over time. To better serve our clients—the host countries and our colleagues in the field—the whole United Nations system has to keep innovating and improving.¹¹

It is evident that the U.N. and its acolytes need to innovate the implementation of the DDR program. A study led by Alpaslan Özerdem and published

in the *Journal of Conflict, Security & Development*, has shown that

much of the discussions of realizing post-conflict reconstruction and development have generally focused on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants. However ... while demobilizing and disarming warring factions is important, the success of reconstruction efforts in a post-conflict environment depends largely on the ability to build and develop capacity and skills that are pertinent to helping reconstruct and promote the development goals of the countries [thus achieving] the state's legitimacy and effectiveness.¹²

As the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance program associates its military capacity building to good governance, I argue that SPMAGTF-AF should dedicate a fair portion of its participation to sustaining post-conflict resolution through efficient reintegration, as proposed earlier.

There is a lot of work that needs to be done in the field of DDR to address and manage political and military conflicts in many areas of Africa. Nevertheless, international efforts and commitment

human trafficking and sometimes sold to militias and forced into conflicts far from home.

Armed and devastating conflicts will continue in Africa if communities continue to seek justice and revenge for the wrongs they've experienced and if opportunities that ensure livelihoods, dignity, and hope are not created. It's neither realistic nor wise to keep pouring humanitarian and economic aid into preventing conflicts from regenerating unless the infighting communities or groups disarm and decide to work collectively to create jobs and opportunities with the help of the U.N. and international NGOs. During my years on the continent of Africa, I have seen firsthand successful and unsuccessful solutions. I am a true believer in multi-sector solutions that meaningfully engage people in business and enterprise. Alex de Waal, an anthropologist and authority in Sahel population studies, likes to quote Bertolt Brecht saying, "In the dark times will there also be singing? Yes, there will also be singing about the dark times."¹⁴ Understanding the interdisciplinary approach to conflict resolution, which consists of embrac-

3. Ibid.

4. John Paul Lederach, Editor, *A Handbook of International Peacebuilding: Into the Eye of the Storm*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

5. "Military Integration as a Factor for Post-Conflict Stability and Reconciliation Rwanda, 1994–2005."

6. Geoffrey Sutton, "Rwanda Remembered: Three Faces of Forgiveness and Reconciliation," *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, (2008), available at <http://pcc.sagepub.com.mutex.gmu.edu>.

7. Natalia Monika Szablewska, *Current Issues in Transitional Justice*, (New York: Springer, 2014).

8. Ibid.

9. Ans Kolk and François Lenfant, "Hybrid Business Models for Peace and Reconciliation," *Business Horizons*, (Online: 2016).

10. "Five Things to Know about Rwanda's Economy," *World Economic Forum*, (Online: 31 October 2016).

11. "DDR in Peace Operations: A Retrospective."

12. Alpaslan Özerdem, "A Re-Conceptualization of Ex-Combatant Reintegration: 'Social Reintegration' Approach." *Journal of Conflict, Security & Development*, (Online: 2012).

13. United Nations, *Second Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: Practices in Peace Operations: The New Horizon Discussion on Challenges and Opportunities for UN Peacekeeping*, (New York: Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Section, 2010).

14. Alexander de Waal, *Famine That Kills: Darfur, Sudan*, (New York: Oxford University Press, revised edition, 2005).



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remain necessary. Increasingly complex and rapidly changing situations are certainly the two most important elements that challenge U.N. peace operations.¹³ We are entering an era where increasing populations are trying to survive on depleting resources among the uncertainties that the changing climate will bring. With these greater economic and environmental pressures, in conflict-prone areas, we are likely to see more and more environmental refugees and ecocide that turns to genocide. Furthermore, the train of development seems to have picked candidates from all continents except from Africa. Those vulnerable individuals who run after the train, trying to reach Europe, are caught in

ing social, cultural, and private business solutions, SPMAGTF-AF will change the dynamics of post-conflict areas so that singing about dark times replaces the reoccurrence of dark times.

Notes

1. Sam Ruhunga, "Military Integration as a Factor for Post-Conflict Stability and Reconciliation Rwanda, 1994–2005," (Calhoun: The NPS Institutional Archive, September 2006).

2. United Nations, "DDR in Peace Operations: A Retrospective," Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions, Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Section, (New York: September 2010).