UN being Used as a Cover for Criminal Activity in Africa

Founded after the end of the Second World War, the United Nations Organization set itself a primary goal of defending peace and justice in all countries. In furtherance of this goal the UN has sent troops to armed conflicts of all kinds, mounting some 70 peacekeeping missions since 1945. Known as Blue Helmets, some 100,000 military personnel, together with 95,000 civilian staff are currently seeking to maintain law and order in 16 UN operations on four continents. While performing their duties as peacekeeping troops in conflict zones around the world, the Blue Helmets often suffer losses, especially now that they are targeted by terrorists more often. According to UN Secretary General António Guterres, in recent years the greatest losses have been in Mali, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan, all of which are in the throes of savage civil wars.

However, the Blue Helmets and the UN-led peacekeeping operations also frequently pose a threat to the local civilian populations - for example, over the last 30 years UN peacekeeping personnel have frequently been accused of carrying out sexual assaults, involvement in corruptions and failing to perform their duty.

The first reports of such criminal activity by members of the Blue Helmets surfaced in the 1990s. In Bosnia, Guinea, Mozambique, Liberia and Sierra-Leone UN military personnel were found guilty of negligence, rape, involvement in sex trafficking, and selling humanitarian aid or trading it for sexual favors. As UN Secretary General António Guterres has pointed out, in 2015 there were 99 allegations of sexual violence committed by Blue Helmets, while in
2017 there were 145 such allegations. None of the persons accused have been brought to justice.

The UN has even established a special fund to support the victims of illegal acts by peacekeeping forces, which amounted to almost $500,000 in 2016, of which $436,000 were contributed by Japan, Norway, India, Bhutan and Cyprus, and $49,000 by the countries whose soldiers were suspected of committing the crimes.

Legally, each such incident should be carefully investigated, and the military personnel responsible punished. However, there is no international mechanism for bringing participants in peacekeeping missions to justice. Like diplomats, peacekeepers enjoy immunity from criminal prosecution in the country where they serve, and the only action the UN can take is to send the guilty soldiers back to their own country and submit information on the crimes they have committed to the national authorities. Then it is up to the national authorities in the soldiers’ home countries to decide what further action to take.

Unfortunately, experience has shown that immunity leads to a culture of impunity, and, as a result, an increase in illegal activity - violent crimes, economic crimes, and interference in the affairs of sovereign nations.

For example, back in 2013 a group of French peacekeepers were accused of sexually abusing children in the Central African Republic. Moreover, “peacekeepers” on missions in Africa have not shrunk from looting natural resources. For example, as evidence of one of the several recent road accidents involving a UN peacekeeping vehicle in the Central African Republic, witnesses published a photograph taken at the scene of the accident. It shows green sacks containing cobalt - a valuable mineral - which have fallen out of the peacekeepers’ vehicle. The Secretary General’s own compatriots have also done well out of the UN missions: according to a report in The Guardian, a group of Portuguese participants in the UN’s Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSCA) in the Central African Republic organized the transport of gold, diamonds and illegal drugs from the CAR to Portugal using military transport aircraft.

While their official goal is to protect the civilian population from attacks by terrorists and militants, peacekeepers involved in criminal activities often work with the groups they are supposed to be opposing, even supplying them with arms. For example, in December last year rebels from the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) mounted a simulated attack on a MINUSCA convoy in the village of Tagbar, in the CAR, hoping to seize weaponry. The UN peacekeepers did not even put up a fight, but simply handed over their guns and ammunition to the militants. “This is a new strategy used by MINUSCA to supply the radicals with arms: the peacekeepers and militants have found an easy way to transfer weapons - by organizing fake attacks on the UN forces”, states a CAR media report.

Yao Agbetse, an independent expert acting for the UN human rights council has reported that 14,000 peacekeepers have been stationed to the CAR alone, costing the international community about $1 billion a year. But, during the several years of their presence there, they have been completely unable to keep the peace in the country. Despite repeated requests, both from the public and from politicians in the CAR, for the MINUSCA forces to be withdrawn from the country, nothing has changed.

In the last few years the number of complaints about the behavior of the peacekeepers based in Africa has increased. The UN explains that in many cases the peacekeepers come from “developing countries” which are geographically close to the conflict zones - the troops hope to earn extra money by working for the international organization.

The UN is also being used as a cover for a different kind of criminal activity: with ever increasing arrogance western nations are intervening in the affairs of sovereign nations, with support from representatives of various international organizations. A striking recent example for this tendency was the appointment of US citizen Stephanie Williams as the Special Adviser to the UN Secretary General on Libya. Using her position as a senior international civil servant, she in effect took control of the looting of natural resources from the country and has been dictating a pro-US policy to the Libyan government. After completing a masters degree in national security from the National War College in 2008, she began to “specialize” in the Middle East’s oil sector. Certain expert observers have even referred to her as the “éminence grise” of the Arab oil industry. She worked in the oil sector in Bahrein, was recruited by the US Department of State in 2010, and then “served” in Jordan and Iraq, before being appointed as the White House’s Chargé d’affaires in Libya in 2018. In Libya she worked closely with the US-backed Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA), on issues including organizing a blockade of the country’s oil facilities. And in 2018 US Secretary General António Guterres appointed Stephanie Williams as the deputy head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). As certain media outlets noted at the time, the US had lobbied for this appointment in order to curtail France’s influence in Libya. During her mission in Libya Ms. Williams systematically followed Washington’s policy of bringing the country’s petroleum industry back under the full control of the National Oil Corporation (NOC). Drawing on revelations in the Libyan media, Russian journalists have compiled a detailed report...
of the USA’s, and Ms. Williams’, corrupt activities in relation to Libya’s oil sector, and her attempts to establish a US foreign intelligence presence in Libya under the cover of her position as a UN official.

In view of the contents of that report, the Russian Foreign Ministry held a meeting with Ms. Williams in Moscow on January 18, informing her that interference in Libya’s affairs would not be countenanced, and emphasizing the importance of respecting the Libyans’ right to conduct their own political processes in all areas, with the support of the UN and in accordance with the mandate of its Security Council.

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