

Chapter 8

The Impact of COVID–19 on Peacekeeping Operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on peacekeeping operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The study relied on qualitative methodology while data was gathered through key informant interviews and documentary search. The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the humanitarian situation in the DRC. This has seen rising unemployment, political instability, and domestic violence being witnessed. The pandemic has fuelled geopolitical friction. Peacekeeping missions are necessitated by the need to facilitate and monitor the political process, protect civilians, assist in the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former combatants and support the organization of elections, protect, and promote human security. If peacekeeping operations are disrupted, there will be chaos, abuse, and forced displacement of people among the region and internationally. It can be concluded that the pandemic has negatively affected peacekeeping operations in the DRC.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the entire world. However, the outbreak has caused peacekeeping operations to become less prioritized as nations are diverting resources towards fighting the pandemic. For example, in 2015, the United Nations (UN) had deployed close to one hundred thousand troops operating with an estimated budget of 8\$ billion (Day & Hunt, 2020). The pandemic has put pressure on the global economy. This means that nations may not have excess funds to support peacekeeping

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operations in troubled regions. Some of the recent peacekeeping deployments were to African countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, South Sudan, and Central African Republic (CAR) (Day & Hunt, 2020). These regions are politically troubled and need continual peacekeeping support. Especially during the past twenty years, peacekeeping operations in the DRC have been the most expensive worldwide (Macqueen, 2018).

The DRC has been known to be going through civil unrest that has lasted for more than 20 years (Day & Hunt, 2020). Macqueen (2018) argues that more than five million have died during the war. Even with international assistance, DRC has failed to contain the conflict. There are more than 3 million people that have been internally displaced ever since the COVID-19 outbreak started (Day & Hunt, 2020). The rebel forces have taken advantage of the pandemic to attack civilians while the government is busy fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. The peacekeeping missions have not been effective regardless of the funds that are poured in. Maybe the COVID-19 outbreak will encourage the UN to have a better approach. It can be further noted that the major powers are now consumed with their own domestic woes. This may lead them to only focus on areas where they have strong geostrategic interests. Global powers have been known to mostly intervene in regions where they expect to reap the most economic benefits.

Nations are also eager to protect their realist interests in the DRC. Macqueen (2018) asserts that the nation is rich in various kinds of natural resources. Even in history, unrest was prevalent in DRC as nations and individuals have been interested in accessing resources. In addition, there are a number of challenges that have been encountered in the peacekeeping operations in the DRC (Dagi, 2017). These points are valid because the intervening nations have a dubious approach. They are more eager to intervene when they have underlying economic or political interests. In that case, the COVID-19 pandemic will only serve to propel unrest that is desired by other powers. Global powers are not willing to participate in regions where they don't have strong geostrategic interests (Day & Hunt, 2020).

Another major problem is that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in reduced peacekeeping personnel. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2020) close to 10 million cases of the virus have been reported, 5 million have recovered and close to 500,000 people have died by June 2020. Even developed countries such as the USA have not been able to contain the virus. Bhat (2020) asserts that states can combat the virus by imposing curfew measures and restricting the movement of people. This means that peacekeeping operations will be deprived of the necessary labor force. Most people would prefer to be confined to their own countries. The shortage of personnel could widen the problem because there will be a lack of proper testing and containment of the virus. Internally displaced people, refugees, and other vulnerable groups will not be accounted for. Displaced populations, including refugees, have been stigmatized, used as scapegoats, and neglected in the emergency response (Dagi, 2017). These people risk further spreading infections. The COVID-19 outbreak has exacerbated a humanitarian crisis that already existed.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study will be informed by the Liberal Peace Theory and Cosmopolitan Theory.

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