

United Nations
Assistance Missions in Afghanistan and Rwanda
A Comparative Study

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The United Nations Assistance Missions are international umbrella operations that provide political and military protection and service to people and regions in need, specifically to war torn areas where unimaginable horrors of starvation, torture, political corruption and even death exist. The UN has been coordinating relief efforts and giving mostly innocent populations hope for a better future. Peacekeeping missions have been employed since 1948 and there are currently seventeen (17) ongoing peacekeeping operations.¹ Among those are the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the expired United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR). Whereby, UNAMIR is a mission that has been terminated and considered as a failure. UNAMA on the other hand has been comparatively quite successful in various categories by rebuilding the Afghan infrastructure, but also by helping the civilians there to recover from decades of civil war and suppression on hands of the Taliban regime. UN Peacekeeping Missions are difficult logistical and financial tasks, not to mention the commitment and high level of professionalism, which UN staff members have to demonstrate. When comparing and contrasting UNAMIR with UNAMA, a difference in financing, dedication and fulfilling of the mission is undeniable. Therefore, several questions emerge vis-à-vis the analysis of both missions. To what extent is UNAMA more successful now than UNAMIR was? What are the implications for such a comparison, i.e. the funds and overall logistics of the missions? And last but not least, what can be done differently in Afghanistan so that a failed mandate like UNAMIR does not repeat itself.

UNAMA was established on 28 March, 2002 by UN Security Council resolution 1401. In regards to this specific resolution it is important to mention that the terms of the resolution were not entirely prepared by the Security Council itself. The initial mandate for UNAMA was based on the

1 <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/bnote.htm>

Bonn Agreement of December, 2001. This was an important meeting that needs to be highlighted in order to understand the background of UNAMA. Under the Bonn Agreement, several influential Afghan politicians and intellectuals that were hostile to the Taliban regime met under UN auspices² in the old West German capital of Bonn. The meeting was created to draft a constitution for Afghanistan as soon as peace and security was ensured in order to set up an interim government, known first as the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) and later as the Transitional Authority (TA). It needs to be added here that the Afghan Interim Authority cannot be viewed as a serious governing body. It rather served as an entity to strengthen national unity within Afghanistan, than supporting capacity building. Various critics of the AIA, including former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, argued at the time, that AIA would not be strong enough by itself to fight off future Taliban attacks.³ Soon enough, the TA replaced the AIA and during 2002, the TA established a range of institutions, such as the Afghan Assistance Co-ordination Authority (AACCA) and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) as well as a National Army⁴ that served to protect Afghans and disarm different military groups and non-state actors. Evidently some initial steps of capacity building were undertaken as soon as the AIA came to power.

After all, reconciliation after decades of civil war was more than necessary in order for the Afghan people to build their new state on solid foundations. Beyond that, the Bonn Agreement called for a judicial commission to rebuild the justice system in accordance with Islamic principles, international standards, the rule of law, and Afghan legal traditions.⁵ By now, UNAMA has established itself in Kabul and nine other cities in Afghanistan as well as hundreds of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO). The Security Council has established the rule of renewing the mandate for UNAMA annually, in order to avoid mistakes that were done in previous UN missions, such as

2 <http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/asia/afghanistan/bonn1yr-bck.htm>

3 <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2538>

4 http://www.unama-afg.org/docs/_nonUN%20Docs/_Internation-Conferences&Forums/Bonn-Talks/bonn.htm#III

5 http://www.unama-afg.org/docs/_nonUN%20Docs/_Internation-Conferences&Forums/Bonn-Talks/bonn.htm

UNAMIR, but also to improve bureaucratically manifested goals and to adjust the financial budget according to the success or failure of the previous year. Thus, the current mandate of UNAMA has the following elements: providing political and strategic advice for the peace process; providing good offices; helping the government to implement the Afghanistan Compact, the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and the National Drugs Control Strategy; promoting human rights, and providing technical assistance.⁶ The reform of the mandate is a valuable tool when comparing the initial mandate to the present one. For example, in 2002, UNAMA was designed with a simple two-pillar structure, where Pillar I was created for political affairs and Pillar II for recovery, relief and reconstruction.⁷ However, the authorities in Afghanistan and the UN staff members employed to the region, soon recognized that the simple structure was appropriate for a light mission, not for a mission of this size and impact, yet the lack of integration between the two pillars led to the reform of the mandate. Furthermore, it is apparent through the research that the initial mandate could not uphold throughout the duration of UNAMA. The initial mandate delivered security and protection as well as simple necessities for every day life of Afghans, such as water and electricity, but not protection for refugees and rebuilding of the local, regional and national economy, etc.

Another UN Assistance Mission was initiated in the mid 1990's to face the tribal conflict in Rwanda, Africa. UNAMIR was established 5 October, 1993, by Security Council Resolution 872 and it officially came to an end on 8 March, 1996. However the withdrawal of all foreign troops and officials of the mission was not completed until April of that same year. The outlines of the initial mandate were to assist in ensuring the security of the capital city of Kigali; monitor the ceasefire agreement and the establishment of an expanded demilitarized zone.⁸ Only later mandates contributed to the security and

6 <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Afgh%20SRES1746.pdf>

7 <http://www.cmi.no/publications/file/?1655=afghanistan-a-snapshot-study>

8 http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/co_mission/unamir.htm

protection of refugees and civilians at risk, i.e. Security Council Resolution 918 and 965, respectively. United Nations' assistance was desperately needed in Rwanda during this time of tribal slaughtering which included deaths that were controlled and targeted, eventually leading to genocide. Whereby scholars like Thomas G. Weiss try to generate sympathy for the completely overwhelmed UNAMIR mission, the United Nations itself came up with a quite negative "Independent Inquiry" three years after the conflict, only to reveal the mistakes and insufficient dedication of the operation. Both sides illustrate that even a decade after the conflict, there is still uncertainty of why the international community was not able to prevent the genocide in Rwanda. The genocide itself was generated through long-lasting differences between ethnic Hutu and Tutsi tribes.

It is important at this point to mention the Arusha Peace Agreements. In a series of meetings between the Rwandan government (under President Juvénal Habyarimana) and the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) a peace agreement was negotiated in order to settle a civil war that had been ongoing for three years. The agreement was to re-establish the rule of law in Rwanda and repatriate refugees that had been displaced during the fighting. Throughout the early 1990's, the UN became aware of the fighting in Rwanda and thus UNAMIR was set up in October, 1993 to prevent the civil war from spreading into neighboring countries and to help refugees reintegrate into Rwanda. The UN particularly rested its confidence in the Arusha Accords, stating in UNSC res. 872 that it welcomed the Arusha Peace Agreements and "urging the parties to continue to comply fully with it."⁹ It needs to seriously be considered what UNAMIR could have prepared until the official genocide in April, 1994 started, in order to prevent it. One could argue to the advantage of UNAMIR, that six months (the period of the initial mandate until the start of the genocide) was not enough time to discover that an entire segment of the civilian population would bear arms against its fellow citizens. However, the leading Force Commander of UNAMIR, Roméo Dallaire has contested in the UN Independent Inquiry report and in his book "*Shake Hands with the Devil*", that not enough preparation was done in order to

9 UN Security Council res. 872

halt the Hutus from slaughtering their Tutsi neighbors. We will examine his statements later on in this paper.

One of the reasons why UNAMA has been quite successful can be accredited to the rather quick decision making and financial support of the international community. With the Tokyo Conference in 2002, pledging \$5 billion over a six-year period and the 2004 Berlin International Conference on Afghanistan committing a staggering \$8.2 billion until 2007¹⁰, a high price tag and dedication to the development of Afghanistan is set in stone. With these funds available, UNAMA has all the financial support it needs in order to have Afghanistan emerge from the shadows of despair. UNAMA coordinates all activities of the UN system in Afghanistan and has tried to implement as many nationals as possible in posts that traditionally had been occupied by expatriates. This leads to more cooperation between Afghan officials and the international community currently present in Afghanistan. It also shows to a certain extent, that the international community is not there as an occupying force, but rather as a network of relief efforts. UNAMA reserves capacity-building as a cardinal principal throughout this process. Militarily, neither the UN nor the U.S. can complain about the size of their force. With an International Security Assistance Force, under NATO auspices, comprising 47,000 troops and Operation Enduring Freedom, under U.S. command, consisting of 13,500 troops, overall 60,500 troops are allocated to Afghanistan. This is a sizable force that compared to the size of force for UNAMIR has a larger area of operations and disposing of action. In addition, through the training aid by the international force, the Afghan National Army has reached a force of 50,000¹¹. In serious security dilemma situations, they can be called upon to assist the existing foreign troops. In comparison to UNAMIR, this assistance would be unimaginable, since the international troops in Rwanda had no backup of local militia or army. Individuals from the press and media often come to the conclusion that

10 Conte, pp. 83

11 http://www.nato.int/ISAF/docu/epub/pdf/progress_afghanistan.pdf

Afghanistan has been a disaster in terms of military success and humanitarian loss, but if that is true, then there is no way to describe the tumultuous situation in Rwanda from 1993-1996. As it becomes evident through the numbers and statistics, there are approximately ten times as many troops in Afghanistan than there were in Rwanda. As political scientist Arne Strand identifies it, this accumulation of such a large force in Afghanistan, can be accredited to specific U.S. national interest in the region, which was certainly not the case for Rwanda. It is also of an advantage to the parties involved in Afghanistan that the Bonn Agreement is not a peace treaty, but rather a variety of general goals and intended power sharing among the victors of a conflict in which their common enemy, the Taliban, was suddenly deposed by the intervention of a *deus ex machina*.¹² In contrast, the Arusha Accords certainly established an apparent peace treaty between the warring parties but the failure of both sides to adhere to the agreements should have been an even further incentive for the international community to get involved.

Other lines of success in Afghanistan are evident when looking back on the 2004 elections, where 10.5 million Afghans voted, of which 41% were women.¹³ It is a pleasant surprise to discover throughout the research of this project, that with the help of the International Organization of Migration (IOM), 800,000 Afghan refugees in Pakistan had the chance to perform absentee ballot. Further successes include the UNHCR's repatriation of approximately 3 million Afghan citizens from neighboring countries, mostly Pakistan and Iran, which supposes that the security measures are given for a safe return. Transport, communications, voter registration, information campaigns and election monitoring were all provided by UNAMA in efforts to allow a fair, representative and successful transition in government. In collaboration with the Afghan Ministry of Education, UNICEF and UNESCO many schools and secondary education facilities have been rebuilt, so that now over 6.2 million children are in education, a number that was unreachable while the Taliban were in power and

12 Strand, pp. 877

13 <http://www.state.gov/g/wi/rls/24792.htm>

an attendance that has multiplied far beyond that of any earlier era.¹⁴ Furthermore, nationwide immunization campaigns were successfully launched, as well as wide-scale surveying and clearance of mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO), which are responsible for many deaths in Afghanistan.

With such a large logistical operation and a lengthy commitment as UNAMA, several failures are inevitable. The central dilemma for UNAMA in the transition period thus remains how to work with a central administration that has a narrow political base, yet ensure that it is eventually replaced by a broad-based, multi-ethnic government as agreed to in Bonn.¹⁵ One specific problem within UNAMA's structure, is that human rights functions are not well served. A small staff of human rights officers are divided among the various components of the mission, depriving human rights of a strong institutional advocate. At the same time, the promotion of human rights is constrained by the requirements of short-term political stability. Despite the centrality of human rights in the Bonn Agreement and various Security Council resolutions, the mission's leadership does not appear to have taken a strong public stand to affirm that human rights are a mission priority. While human rights functions are recognized as being part of the mission, they do not appear to have a sufficiently strong institutional identity within the mission structure. The motto of UNAMA's human rights teams must include to be most efficient in the least amount of time in order to rescue as many lives as possible. One specific area of responsibility of UNAMA is that it opened up to receiving complaints from individuals or groups, victims or witnesses of abuses and violations in order for UNAMA officials to investigate them.¹⁶ However, if every Afghan has a complaint, it is highly questionable that with a small number of field officers, UNAMA can adequately handle all these complaints. Interestingly, UNAMA relies a great deal on the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, established within the Bonn Agreement, as the national institution in charge of defining the Human Rights agenda in

14 Bearak, pp. 1

15 <http://www.cmi.no/publications/file/?1655=afghanistan-a-snapshot-study>

16 http://www.unama-afg.org/about/_hr/Human_Rights.htm

Afghanistan. This has led to some confusion over the jurisdiction of investigating and monitoring abuses as well as the protection of Afghans.

In terms of financial support, UNAMA can seriously not have any complains. However, a 2006 Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) report, states that during that fiscal year, Afghanistan received \$17 million and the Tsunami fund (referring to the December, 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake) received \$ 76 million.¹⁷ Now Afghanistan has certainly received funds from other sources, but the initial support within OCHA for this sum was based on the grounds that the Tsunami displaced such a high volume of the population of the countries affected in a very short period of time. Precisely, the earthquake and the following deadly Tsunami displaced 1.69 million people, whereas Afghanistan has approximately 3 million refugees, most of them residing in Pakistan (2.1 million) and Iran (900k)¹⁸. It is not much of a failure by the international community, but rather a sign of priorities.

The successes and failures of UNAMIR are widely contested. Several scholars and authors, such as Thomas Weiss and Duane Bratt have investigated the conflict in Rwanda and came to the conclusion that under the given circumstances, UNAMIR and other Intl. Organizations and NGOs based in Rwanda at the time, did everything possible to provide the population with food, shelter and protection. Weiss even further glorifies UNAMIR's effort by claiming that, "UNAMIR can be credited with saving 25,000 lives."¹⁹ One has to clarify that, given the resources and ability of the international community at that time and the United Nations being the body that represents the international community, saving 25,000 lives out of an estimated 900,000 deaths is not exactly a number to be proud of. Specifically, when voices grew loud immediately after the abrupt end of UNAMIR's mandate that more could have been done to save lives in Rwanda.

One of the few promising moments during the genocide in Rwanda was Opération Turquoise.

17 <http://ochaonline.un.org/ocha2006ar/html/annexes2.html>

18 Weiss, pp. 167

19 Weiss, pp. 103

This operation, single handedly carried out by the French government, deployed some 2,500 troops and 700 vehicles²⁰. The French involvement was highly criticized at the time due to French historical support for a Hutu government, as well as the history of French neo-imperialism in Africa. One must say to the advantage of the French that they took matters in their own hands despite the surrounding criticism. The criticism was illegitimate, considering that UN troops were insufficient and by June, 1994, there were 514,000 refugees and 1.4 million internally displaced persons. The operation lasted sixty days and the French government invested \$240 million²¹ into it; compared to the overall UNAMIR budget of \$453.9 million²², lasting for three years, it becomes evident how ill-funded the entire UNAMIR mission was. Now continuing the comparison to UNAMA, at the peak of the mission, UNAMIR was authorized to have a force level of 5,500 troops. When considering that by April 1994, about a year after UNAMIR was established, an estimated 200,000 civilians were massacred; it is not understandable how the UN could just monitor the conflict without acting efficiently and promptly. Even in spite of banter about an all-African force under the command of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), nothing materialized for lack of political will and transport.²³ Considering these facts, there were simply not enough “blue helm” troops sent, to demobilize Hutu militias and specifically not enough to protect and re-integrate refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

One other small glimpse of success by the UN vis-à-vis Rwanda can be attributed to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Established in November 1998, it gave jurisdiction to prosecute crimes which occurred between 1 January, 1994 and 31 December, 1994. The tribunal was under UN auspices and had authority over genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Up until now the tribunal can offer 21 finished trials, where 28 accused persons have been convicted. 11 trials are in progress and 14 individuals are awaiting trial in detention, which is awful, considering the

20 Weiss, pp. 104

21 Weiss, pp. 109

22 http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/co_mission/unamirF.htm

23 Melvern, pp. 103

genocidal events of Rwanda occurred a decade ago.²⁴

Concluding remarks

Three years after the termination of the mandate, an Independent Inquiry by the UN was launched and headed by Ingvar Carlsson, that reviewed the entire process of UNAMIR, only to discover its dilemma and ultimate failure. There are too many failures of UNAMIR to list here, but some need to be mentioned to comprehend the mistakes that were made. For example, the report suggests that, “a force numbering 2,500 should have been able to stop or at least limit massacres of the kind which began in Rwanda after the plane crash which killed the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi.²⁵ Yet, no such force was deployed and the information above indicates that there was no response from the U.N. immediately after the plane crash. A terrible mistake was made, considering that the country, where civil war activities grew abundant throughout UNAMIR's presence, was now without a head of state. After the situation started deteriorating, an immediate adjustment of the mandate by the Security Council would have been the adequate response. Instead, without making an attempt, the Secretariat believed that it would not be possible to get the Council's support for 4,500 additional troops. This hints a bureaucratic hurdle by the Security Council, in order for the Secretariat to act accordingly. This was by many accounts an example that demonstrated flaws in the effectiveness of the UN system and its member states. To make matters worse, according to the Independent Inquiry, the Force Commander of UNAMIR, Lt.-General Roméo Dallaire had particular information about an existing plan by the Hutus to exterminate Tutsis²⁶. This information was not shared by the leadership of DPKO with the Secretary-General and the Security Council. That becomes a problem when the continued support for UNAMIR is conditioned on the progress of the peace process between the Rwandan government and the RPF²⁷. Furthermore, these plans by Hutus were illegitimate, based on the

²⁴ www.ictj.org/factsheets/achievementsofthetribunal (http://69.94.11.53/default.htm)

²⁵ Carlsson, UN Independent Inquiry Report on Rwanda, pp. 30

²⁶ Carlsson, UN Independent Inquiry Report on Rwanda, pp. 33

²⁷ <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C02E5DF1530F934A25751C1A96F958260&sec=&spn=&>

previous Arusha Accords and therefore, President Habyarimana should have been under constant pressure by the Security Council to implement the promises made in Arusha. Moreover, the report highlights that it was a serious mistake to involve a Belgian contingent, a former colonial power, to participate in UNAMIR. It showed serious signs of bad planning and reckless conduct. Of course, Belgium could have played an important diplomatic role in the conflict, as advisors behind the scenes due to their knowledge of the country and people. But to actually involve Belgian field officers and troops into an already hostile environment was a bad decision that certainly led to mistrust among the Rwandan population in relation to the entire UNAMIR mission. This is also right around the time when UN troops and staff members began getting attacked by locals.

Ultimately, in lieu of United Nations Assistance Missions, the failure of UNAMIR outweighs the success of UNAMA. It seems that through the bureaucratic machinery of the Security Council, peacekeeping in Rwanda and prevention of the genocide were extremely hampered. However, this project does not try to contest the existence of United Nations Assistance Missions, it rather offers a critical insight how past operations have not been given full attention by members of the international community. That is exactly what the initial fifty member states pledged to do on June 26th, 1945 when they signed the Charter of the United Nations and with the high ambitions that it has, it must be able to carry them out as well. There was a five-year span between the termination of UNAMIR and the beginning of UNAMA. Some serious reforms and changes within the Assistance Mission programs is visible, which can only be an advantage to the people that rely on such operations. Further reforms within the Secretariat and the Security Council need to be enforced in order to combat the plethora of peacekeeping missions that are yet to come. In the end it is safe to say that up until now, UNAMA is a more successful Assistance Mission than UNAMIR was. Reasons for that are indicated above, but come down to the lack of political will in Rwanda and more financial contributions in Afghanistan.

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