Chapter 13

Regional Political Leadership and Policy Integration in Great Lakes Region of Africa

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ABSTRACT

For the past two decades, following the Rwandan genocide in 1994, the Great Lakes Region of Africa has become a conflict-ridden zone marked by mass violations of human rights and political instabilities. Part of these instabilities and violence is due to the lack of strong and stable political leadership and institutions in many of the countries in the region. In 1996, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was plagued by the uprising of the rebel movement called the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaïre. This movement was a coalition of Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda, along with Congolese people. However, the AFDL victory was short-lived since the coalition parties broke up their alliance in 1998, which led to a new cycle of conflict which continued to destabilize the DRC to date with its Eastern provinces being most affected. In addition to conflict within the DRC, political instability and crisis of legitimacy of political leadership in South Sudan, Burundi, and the Central African Republic have also exacerbated the instability in the region. In this chapter, the author argues that peace and stability in the Great Lakes Region of Africa would depend on how best several facets of policies are integrated into one operational framework for peace and stability.

INTRODUCTION

Following the Rwandan genocide in 1994, the Great Lakes Region of Africa became a conflict-ridden zone marked by mass violations of human rights and political instabilities. Part of these instabilities was due to the lack of strong and stable regional political leadership and institutions in many countries in the region. For instance, in 1996 the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was plagued by the uprising of the rebel movement called the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaïre, which is known by the acronym, AFDL. This movement was a coalition constituted by troops from...
Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda, along with Congolese people. The AFDL managed to unseat President Mobutu who had ruled the country for more than 32 years. However, the AFDL victory was short-lived since the coalition parties broke up their alliance in 1998. This rupture led to a new cycle of conflicts which continue to destabilize the DRC to date, with its Eastern provinces being the most affected. In addition to conflict within the DRC, political instability and crisis of political legitimacy among leadership in South Sudan, Burundi and the Central African Republic have also exacerbated instability in the region. For all the countries mentioned in the abstract, including the DRC, conflicts are rooted in political, economic, social, as well as ethnic issues. To ensure peace and stability, it is critical to promote and articulate security mechanisms under a regional and inclusive framework. Hence, the central argument running in this chapter is that political leaders in the Great Lakes Regions of Africa should strengthen regional mechanisms that promote peace and stability by integrating policies in their security framework. The complexity of crisis in the region requires that leaders elevate their strategic responses to move from national security strategies toward inclusive and collaborative regional security approaches.

Conceptual Framework

It contended that a context sensitive approach that is conceptualized within a peacebuilding framework may be a critical contribution to a new discourse about stability and security in the Great Lakes Region of Africa. Thus, applying integrated conflict resolution and community development strategies could go a long way in securing peace. And as such, regional political leaders could use this approach as part of the peacebuilding initiatives essential to the restoration of fractured lives within the damaged social fabrics.

Peacebuilding

The understanding of the concept of peacebuilding requires an in-depth analysis of the notion of peace. According to McCandless (2013), Galtung argued, the notion of peace can be understood from a perspective of negative and positive peace. Negative peace refers to the cessation or absence of violence, such as mass killing, rape as weapon of war, etc. To the other hand positive peace implies structural changes to address social, political and economic injustices that may be at the center of violence. This view of positive peace can be strengthened by putting into practice values promoted through the framework of human security which aims at establishing an environment free from violence and from fear of violence (Human Security Report, 2013). From this standpoint, Peacebuilding is often defined in terms of institutional and structural efforts (micro or/and macro), aiming to restore peace after a period of conflict or instability. According to Boutros Ghali, the late former Secretary General of the United Nations, peacebuilding should be perceived as the identification and establishment of structures which promote the building of a peaceful environment so that there is little chance to return to conflict (Constance, 2009).

In addition, any initiative that promotes peacebuilding should focus on processes and initiatives that aim to transform communities and rebuilt human dignity. It is therefore necessary to think of creating inclusive mechanisms and structures that facilitate and support dialogue between different actors involved in conflicts. These endeavors could be orchestrated through community-based initiatives in forms of workshops and training facilitated by conflict resolution specialists targeting influential grassroots, middle range and political leaders (Richmond, 2001). Such effort should stimulate the international community, regional leadership as well as national governments to promote and support initiatives that