

Strengths and Weaknesses of ONUMOZ

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Measured against the operation's mandate and schedule, ONUMOZ was successful in that it contributed to a reasonably stable and quick transition from war to peace, and to the organisation and conduct of peaceful, free and fair elections which marked the symbolic birth of Mozambique as a liberal democracy.

However, a more rigorous analytical perspective is taken here in assessing this operation. Assuming that the ultimate purpose of peace-keeping is to create the conditions for a positive peace, thus avoiding the recurrence of violent conflict, the article will now analyse the strengths and weaknesses of ONUMOZ. The operation's success was due to a combination of factors. First, the overwhelming will for peace on the part of Mozambican people exerted decisive pressure on the signatories of the Rome accord. This, coupled with the country's material and psychological exhaustion and the absence of foreign sources of support for war, made peace the only viable option for both the government and Renamo. In the view of the author, this was the real source of the much-acclaimed 'political will' for peace displayed by both parties.

Second, the presence of a peace accord which established a functional partnership between the government and Renamo in the peace process, on the one hand, and gave the United Nations a central political role in the conduct of that process, on the other hand. The agreement was at once fairly comprehensive and sufficiently vague to allow for a degree of flexibility of interpretation.

An example of that flexibility was the establishment of the trust fund to assist Renamo's transformation into a political party. The ethical shortcomings of this initiative were discussed earlier and, thus far, do not seem to be an issue in Mozambique; its long-term implications, however, remain to be seen.

Another important feature of the peace accord was that it created a powerful political structure to supervise its implementation. In effect, the Supervisory and Monitoring Commission and its subsidiary commissions were the ultimate derisory bodies in all matters pertaining the implementation of the peace agreement. The fact that all decisions were made by consensus of the two Mozambican parties in these commissions created

a valuable space for confidence-building. It is apparent, though, that the parties failed to open fully that window of opportunity.

Third, ONUMOZ's leadership seized and never surrendered the initiative in the management of the peace process. This was possible largely because in the sense that Aldo Ajello was effectively the representative of the entire international community. To achieve that, the Special Representative performed his function in a proactive and imaginative way. This was manifested in the efforts to make the peace process a transparent one through weekly press briefings, the strict adherence to the principle of decisions by consensus of the parties to the peace accord, and, most importantly, the active involvement in the peace process of the local representatives of the international community.

The Special Representative met regularly with the international members of the Supervision and Monitoring Commission. (the OAU, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States); the group of African ambassadors in Maputo; the ambassadors from the European Union member states; and the group of 'like-minded countries' (the Scandinavian states, Canada and the Netherlands). These meetings were held with the purpose of discussing and building a wide consensus around all issues relevant to the implementation of the peace accord. The Special Representative also briefed regularly other international representatives who were not part of any of these groups.

As a result of the common understanding of the issues and the unity of purpose that were developed in this process of consultation, the Special Representative enjoyed the unequivocal support of the international community, what enhanced his influence and negotiating powers vis-à-vis the Mozambican parties to the conflict.

Another contributing factor to the success of ONUMOZ was that the United Nations proved to be more flexible a bureaucracy than it is normally credited for. Confronted with the proactive and at times unorthodox approach of the ONUMOZ leadership, the UN headquarters were able to accommodate those initiatives in the field that did not conform strictly with the house rules and procedures, but were critical to move the process forward.

Despite the positive features analysed above, ONUMOZ was not completely free of weaknesses and controversy. The first such problem is a perennial a one, typical of peace-keeping operations: the lack of enforcement powers, which would have demanded a different mandate, determined that ONUMOZ strictly observed the principle

of decision-making by consensus. This had both a positive and negative impact on the peace process.

Decision by consensus of the government and Renamo was strength in the sense that it enabled a degree of ownership of the process, and the attendant accountability for its outcome, by the Mozambican parties. It formally respected and enhanced the sovereign will of the signatories of the Rome agreement. However, it was also a weakness since it gave the Mozambican parties enough latitude of manoeuvre to seek tactical advantages at every step of the peace process. Moreover, it led to significant delays with the cantonment and demobilisation of troops, the establishment of an effective state administration and freedom of movement throughout the country, and frustrated the full collection and destruction of military arsenals.

A second problem was the long time elapsed between the formal establishment of ONUMOZ and the full deployment of the peace-keepers mission area. As a result, "much of the momentum of the Peace Agreement was lost and there was some anxiety that fighting might start again ." This motivates the desirability for the United Nations to be able to deploy peace-keepers immediately at the beginning of a peace process.

The broad variety in the level of professionalism displayed by the different national contingents of peace-keepers and police observers, was another element of concern. It suggests the need for clearly defined training requirements, as well as tighter selection criteria for peace-keepers.

Another important weakness revealed by ONUMOZ was the difficulty experienced in overcoming the diverging institutional cultures of peace-keepers, on the one hand, and humanitarian agencies, on the other. The United Nations should develop a new conceptual framework for peace operations that takes into account this tension between the demands of maximum results in minimum time and the long-term development requirements, an inherent feature in contemporary peace-keeping.