

# Challenges and Priorities for Peace Operations Partnerships Between the UN and Regional Organizations - the African Union Example

## Introduction

This policy brief will explore the challenges and priorities for peace operations partnerships between the United Nations (UN) and regional organizations.<sup>1</sup> In particular, it will look at the partnership between the UN and the African Union (AU), because this example is shaping our interpretation of what is possible under Chapter 8 (Regional Arrangements) of the UN Charter.

Three considerations explain the importance of regional approaches to peace operations: (1) a conflict is rarely isolated within state borders, (2) those who are closer to the problem are often in a better position to understand and influence it, and (3) their proximity ensures that they have a long-term interest in its outcomes. Sometimes, however, the interests of neighbours and other regional actors are so closely interwoven with the dynamics of a particular crisis or conflict that their involvement adds further layers to the complexity of the problem. In such cases, an actor that is further removed from the problem can often play a constructive role when it comes to analysis, mediation or peacekeeping. There will thus always be a need to carefully balance the role and responsibilities of the UN and regional organizations.

Africa currently dominates discussions about the UN and regional organizations. Approximately 75 per cent of the UN's peacekeepers are deployed on African soil and approximately the same proportion of the UN peacekeeping budget is devoted to missions in Africa. This has not always been the case. Peacekeeping missions in Asia, Europe and Latin America used to take up a much larger share of the UN's attention. The Middle East remains an important area for UN peace operations, and it is not improbable that the

<sup>1</sup> The evolving relationships of and contributions to peace operations by the UN and regional organizations have been one of the main thematic focuses of the Challenges Forum over the years; in particular as pertaining to the UN, AU, EU, NATO, LAS, OSCE, CSTO and ECOWAS. For further information, see [www.challengesforum.org](http://www.challengesforum.org).

## Background details

This policy brief was originally written as a background paper for the Challenges 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Forum 2016 on *United Nations Peace Operations 2020: The United Nations Reviews and Their Implications for Tomorrow's Missions*, co-hosted by Challenges Forum Partners Armenia, Indonesia, Nigeria, Sweden and the United States in New York on 8-9 May.

The views expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Challenges Forum Partnership, Secretariat or hosts of the Challenges 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Forum.

## About the author

Dr Cedric de Coning is a senior researcher with the Peace and Conflict Research Group at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) and a senior adviser on peacekeeping and peacebuilding for the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD). He has served on the UN Peacebuilding Fund Advisory Group, with UN DPKO and in UNTAET (Timor Leste). He started his career as a South African diplomat in Washington, D.C., and Addis Ababa. Dr de Coning holds a PhD from the Department of Philosophy at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa.



UN may be called on to implement peace agreements in Syria and Yemen in the foreseeable future. Tensions are also rising in several trouble spots in Asia and Latin America, and the UN's newest operation is being deployed to Colombia. The relationship between the UN and regional organizations thus remains an important issue for all regional organizations.

### The UN and the African Union - a Strategic Partnership

For the moment, however, the most important regional relationship for the UN is its relationship with the AU. This is the case not only because the crises and conflicts in Africa take up the largest portion of the time of the UN Security Council, it is also because African capacities are an important resource for UN peacekeeping. Africa contributes approximately 50 per cent of all the UN's uniformed peacekeepers, 60 per cent of its international civilian peacekeepers and 80 percent of its national peacekeeping staff.<sup>2</sup>

The UN is a critical enabler for AU operations, as it has provided some form of support to all AU peace operations to date. The UN is also an important exit strategy partner for the AU, as all AU peace operations so far have been handed over to the UN once sufficient stability has been achieved. The effectiveness of UN and AU peace operations are thus mutually interdependent on several levels.

The peace operations that the AU undertakes are to a large extent a regional response to global problems. Most African conflicts are global in the sense that they are heavily influenced, if not driven, by external factors like the global war on terror; the intervention in Libya; the exploitation of natural resources by multinational companies; capital flight facilitated and solicited by the international financial system; and transnational organized crime, driven by markets in the West and Asia for narcotics, human trafficking, timber and illegally caught fish. Effective African peace operations thus represent a significant contribution to the global common good.

For this reason, the AU has been arguing consistently for many years that it, together with other regional organizations, is effectively part of a collective global peace and security architecture. Therefore, when the AU is asked to help the UN to maintain international peace and security in a particular crisis in Africa, the UN should use its assessed contribution system to finance the peace operations that the AU is undertaking on behalf of the rest of the global system.<sup>3</sup> The UN assessed contribution budget for peace operations is the most effective and efficient global burden-sharing arrangement for peace operations, as all members of the international system contribute to the budget against a pre-agreed scale of assessment.

*...the UN should use its assessed contribution system to finance the peace operations that the AU is undertaking on behalf of the rest of the global system.*

<sup>2</sup> UN Peacekeeping Fact Sheet, available at: <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/factsheet.shtml>, accessed on 24 April 2016.

<sup>3</sup> African Union, Peace and Security Council, *Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on follow-up steps on the Common African Position on the Review of United Nations Peace Operations*, PSC/AHG/3.(DXLVII), 26 September 2015.

This AU argument is revitalizing the meaning of Chapter 8 of the UN Charter for the needs of the 21st century. It is gaining considerable support, which was echoed in the 2015 report of the UN High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO), as well as the subsequent report of the UN Secretary-General.<sup>4</sup>

The financing of regional peace operations is, however, only a subset of a number of larger strategic partnership challenges posed by the relationship between the UN and the AU and the emerging concept of a global peace and security architecture.

## Towards a Predictable Division of Labour

The conflict dynamics that the UN, the AU and the other regional organizations have to deal with continue to change rapidly and have become more complex, asymmetrical and challenging. In many contemporary conflict zones, violent extremists and transnational organized criminals deliberately choose to use violence to pursue their objectives, with civilian populations, aid workers and increasingly peacekeepers as targets.

Effectively managing such conflicts requires robust capabilities that can contain and manage aggressors and ensure basic stability, so that political and humanitarian work can be undertaken to alleviate suffering and seek medium- to longer-term political solutions. Today, all the AU's and approximately two thirds of the UN's peacekeepers are deployed amidst on-going conflict in missions where there is no peace agreement in place.

In this context, another important factor in the partnership is the ways in which the UN and AU complement and augment each other. The UN is good at implementing peace agreements and consolidating peace processes, but it is not well suited for enforcement actions. The AU has demonstrated that it is willing and able to undertake stabilization and counter-terrorism operations, but it lacks the broad set of capacities necessary to implement comprehensive peace agreements. The UN and AU thus have mutually reinforcing capabilities and needs that should serve as a basis for a strategic partnership.

As a result, an informal partnership model has emerged where the AU, together with subregional organizations and mechanisms in Africa, and with support from the UN and partners, has acted as a first responder to crises in Africa. This has been the case in Burundi (AMIB<sup>5</sup>), the Central African Republic (CAR) (MISCA<sup>6</sup>), Darfur (AMIS<sup>7</sup>) and Mali (AFISMA<sup>8</sup>). When basic stability had been achieved, these missions were handed over to the UN,

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace – Politics, Partnership and People: Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations*, A/70/95–S/2015/446, 17 June 2015; and United Nations, *The future of United Nations peace operations: implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations*, Report of the Secretary-General, A/70/357–S/2015/682, 2 September 2015.

<sup>5</sup> African Mission in Burundi.

<sup>6</sup> The African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic.

<sup>7</sup> African Union Mission in Sudan.

<sup>8</sup> African-led International Support Mission to Mali.

and in many cases the African military and police peacekeepers were re-hatted and became UN peacekeepers.

Somalia has been the exception in that sufficient stability has not yet been achieved to trigger a handover to the UN. However, the AU and UN have jointly developed benchmarks for a future transition. In the meantime, AMISOM<sup>9</sup> and UNSOM<sup>10</sup> are working closely together and the UN Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) supports both.

The question is whether the UN and regional organizations should establish a more formal global peace and security architecture, governed by the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. that threats to international peace and security should be dealt with at the most immediate (or local) level that is consistent with their resolution. At the moment, the relationships between the UN and regional organizations are undefined. Although the primary responsibility of the UN Security Council is not questioned, this does not amount to a hierarchal system where the regional organizations are subsidiary to the UN. At present, they co-exist in a loosely defined manner that requires voluntary coordination and causes both tension and competition. The implications of a global peace and security architecture approach is that the UN and regional organizations, like the AU, agree to a more clearly defined division of roles under a burden-sharing arrangement. Such predictability would enhance cooperation, coordination and efficiency – all crucial factors towards increasing the chances for a more successful end-result.

### Institutionalizing the Partnership

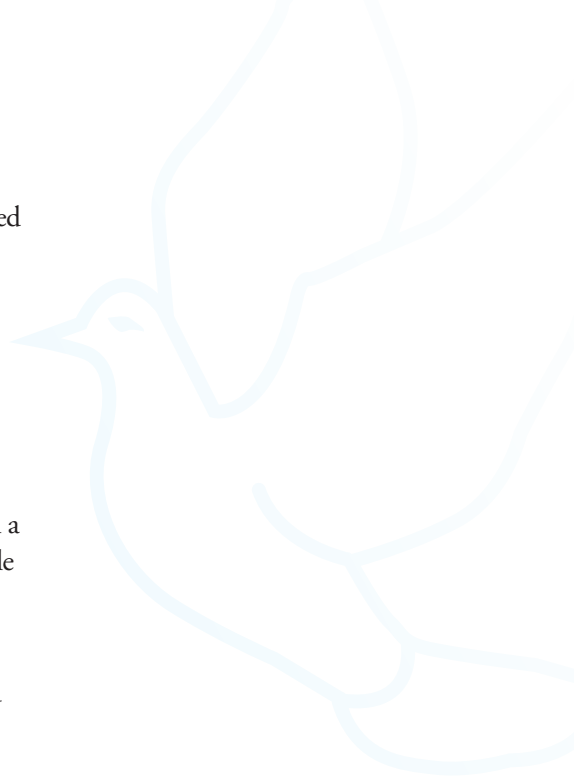
At the strategic level, the UN and the AU need to foster a common narrative that is mutually re-enforcing and respectful of each other's roles and comparative advantages. The members of the UN Security Council and the AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC) have started to meet regularly. However, these kind of meetings need to be further deepened so as to ensure even greater coherence between the approaches of the UN Security Council and the AU PSC on the many conflicts that are on their mutual agenda.

At the operational level, the UN and AU have been meeting regularly at the desk-to-desk level, but these meetings now need to start delivering specific outcomes, such as developing guidelines for joint assessments, shared analysis, joint planning, AU-UN inter-mission coordination and cooperation, mission support, best practices, joint evaluations and joint Standard Operating Procedures for transitions.

Almost all AU peace operations will be accompanied by UN Special Political Missions, similar to the way UNSOM and AMISOM operate side-by-side in Somalia. At the same time, most UN peace operations in Africa will be accompanied by AU Special Political Missions, such as is currently the case with

<sup>9</sup> African Union Mission in Somalia.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia.



***...the UN and the AU need to foster a common narrative that is mutually re-enforcing and respectful of each other's roles and comparative advantages.***

*Because [the AU missions] did not have the resources, the UN had to take over these missions and deploy stabilization type missions that go beyond its peace-keeping principles and doctrine.*

MINUSMA<sup>11</sup> and MISAHEL<sup>12</sup> in Mali and MINUSCA<sup>13</sup> and MISAC<sup>14</sup> in CAR. A set of pre-agreed joint guidelines will make it easier for both organizations to involve each other from the earliest stages in assessments, planning, coordination mechanisms, mission support, benchmarks and evaluation. This is especially important in those cases where AU peace operations transition into UN peace operations, or vice versa.

## UN Support for AU Peace Operations

The AU's most significant weakness is that it lacks predictable funding for the peace operations it undertakes, and this dilemma impacts negatively on the UN. For instance, the UN had to – as a last resort – take over the AU's missions in Mali and CAR earlier than it would have had to if the AU missions had the resources necessary to stay a bit longer and ensure more stability. Because they did not have the resources, the UN had to take over these missions and deploy stabilization type missions that go beyond its peacekeeping principles and doctrine. The AU and the UN will have to consider more predictable and sustainable ways in which AU and other regional peace operations can be financed.

The AU decided in 2015 that by 2020 it would self-finance at least 25 per cent of the cost of its peace and security activities. In order to realize this goal, the AU has appointed Dr Donald Kaberuka, the outgoing President of the African Development Bank, as the High Representative for the AU Peace Fund, and tasked him with putting in place a clear road map for financing the AU's peace and security activities. The UN and AU are also undertaking a joint study that will look into a broad range of options for funding AU peace operations. Various efforts are thus underway to seek creative and innovative ways to finance African peace operations. The solutions generated will open options through which peace operations undertaken by other regional organizations can also be funded in the future.

There are many ways in which the UN and regional organizations can work more closely together when it comes to mission support. For instance, the UN can make some of its Department of Field Support capabilities available to the AU, including its Brindisi and Kampala logistical depots; include the AU in some on-call procurement arrangements, for instance strategic airlift; and partner with the AU in developing essential mission support planning and managing capabilities in the AU Commission and AU missions.

## Conclusions

Although the UN is ultimately responsible for international peace

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.

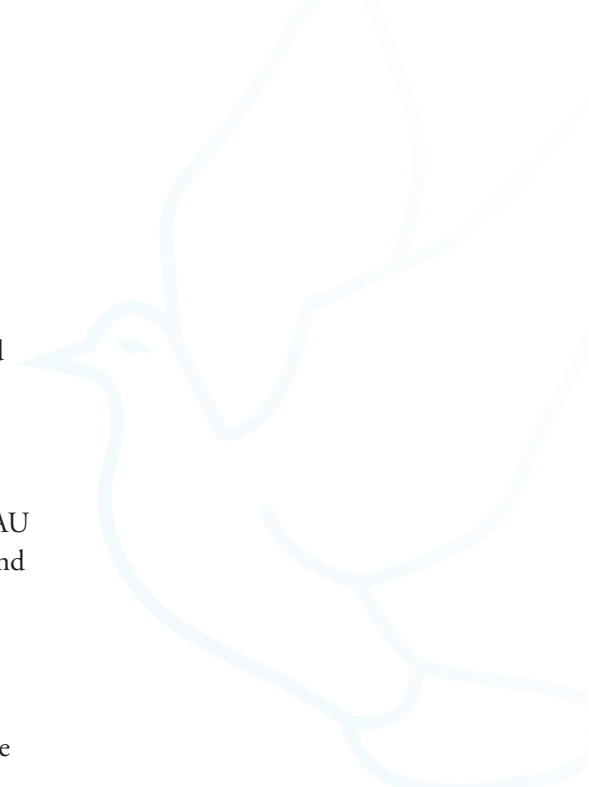
<sup>12</sup> African Union Mission for Mali and Sahel.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic.

<sup>14</sup> AU Mission for the CAR and Central Africa.

and security, it cannot carry the burden on its own. Cooperating with regional organizations in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East will help to share the burden, and assist the UN to carry out its responsibility with more efficiency and effectiveness than would have been the case if the UN acted on its own. Such cooperation also strengthens local capacity and ownership and thus helps to prevent future conflicts.

Among these relationships, the relationship between the UN and the AU stands out at the moment as the most crucial for international peace and security. The effectiveness of UN and AU peace operations is mutually interdependent on several levels, and a concerted effort is needed from both the UN and the AU to ensure that this relationship is further deepened and institutionalized. In this regard, the Member States of both organizations—and all the Member States of the AU are of course also Members of the UN—have a shared responsibility to instruct, monitor, follow-up and, ultimately, hold both institutions accountable for maintaining a close and well-functioning strategic partnership.<sup>15</sup> The solutions generated in this process, and the example set by the UN-AU strategic partnership, is shaping the way we understand the role of regional organizations in the emerging global peace and security architecture.



---

<sup>15</sup> Cedric de Coning, Linnea Gelot and John Karlsrud, *The Future of African Peace Operations: From Janjaweed to Boko Haram*, (Zed Books: London, 2016).







## **INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR THE CHALLENGES OF PEACE OPERATIONS**

The Challenges Forum is a strategic and dynamic platform for constructive dialogue among leading policymakers, practitioners and academics on key issues and developments in peace operations. The Forum contributes to shaping the debate by identifying critical challenges facing military, police and civilian peace operations, by promoting awareness of emerging issues and by generating recommendations for solutions for the consideration of the broader international peace operations community. It is a global network of Partners representing 47 peace operations departments and organizations from 22 countries. [www.challengesforum.org](http://www.challengesforum.org)