Crisis response and peace operations in Africa

Understanding the emerging African Peace Operations model, where it came from, the way it works and future challenges is crucial for humanitarian and emergency response communities, say **Cedric de Coning, Linnéa Gelot** and **John Karlsrud**

Sharing operational theatres and responding jointly to complex humanitarian crises across civil-military lines, as well as institutional or national affiliations, requires institutional adaptation to shifting strategic interests, multiple demands and volatile conflict and crisis dynamics.

The entry point for most large-scale emergency response regimes in Africa in the future will be African-led 'stabilisation' missions. However, the new reality is one of a global network of peace and security actors, and African Union (AU) missions will be deployed alongside various sub-regional, UN and EU political, humanitarian and development interventions. This creates challenges of duplication, overlap and rivalry, but also provides all involved with opportunities to collaborate, to co-ordinate division of roles, and to enter into burden-sharing arrangements and strategic partnerships.

A comprehensive approach takes on additional importance since most migrant, refugee and stateless communities remain on the continent. It is African countries like Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya and South Africa that host most African migrants and refugees. These same countries are also among the biggest troop contributors to African as well as United Nations-led peace operations. It is thus important that we support more networked approaches that can result in more effective protection of civilians, and that can enhance host state as well as community resilience.

Stabilisation cannot be achieved through military means alone. Conflicts, at their core, are political and their resolution requires political solutions

Simon Townsley | Rex

African peace operations, in collaboration with international partners, are important tools in a continent-wide conflict management system designed to respond simultaneously to several complex and dynamic crisis, such as currently experienced in: Mali and the Sahel; Somalia and South Sudan in the Horn of Africa; the Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi in the Great Lakes; and Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon in the Lake Chad basin. Over the last decade, the AU and the Regional Economic Communities/ Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) have fielded over ten peace operations to Burundi, CAR, Comoros, Darfur, Mali and Somalia. In 2013 alone, a total of approximately 40,000 uniformed and civilian personnel were mandated to serve in AU peace operations (approximately 71,000, if the joint AU-UN hybrid mission in Darfur is also taken into account). Throughout 2014 and in early 2015 this number was around 30,000 personnel.

To meet rapidly changing conflict patterns and security trends, a variety of institutional interlinkages and hybrid partnership models are emerging, but these models are often poorly developed or institutionalised. There is a need to develop both resilient African models and collaborative approaches. From our engagement with practitioners, diplomats and various donors and partners working with African regional institutions, we suggest in our book (see overleaf) that a unique model of African peace operations is emerging.

During the last decade, African regional actors have shown their indispensability as partners and as leading actors in global efforts to enhance peace and security in Africa. The UN Security Council (UNSC) relies on proactive regional interventionism to sustain the reach and access of UN agencies and other international presences. First responder deployments by a number of African states, through the AU and the RECs/RMs, are a precondition for many humanitarian operations today. They provide the minimum security and stability necessary for many humanitarian organisations to work in the worst violence affected areas, and they also prepare the ground for a transition to comprehensive UN-led peace operations.

A pattern of complex hybridity is emerging. The UNSC relies on the AU and the RECs/RMs to act as first responders to emerging crises and to stabilise conflicts where violent fighting is ongoing. The UN is unable to generate troops and police in sufficient numbers and deploy them rapidly enough to meet the demands. Structural constraints, such as bureaucratic rationales and security and safety rules, as well as normative constraints, including the UN's core principles regarding impartiality, consent of the parties to the conflict, and non-use of force except in self-defence and in the defence of the mandate, further contribute to UN peacekeeping operations being unable to effectively manage situations where violent conflict is ongoing.

African regional actors rely on the UNSC's legitimacy for their actions and on financial and other types of assistance from international partners, as well as African states and institutions. African institutions are also developing and institutionalising their peace and security mechanisms concurrently with peace operations being deployed, tested and assessed. The emerging African Standby Force (ASF) is a key component of the African Peace and Security Infrastructure Architecture (APSA) that is simultaneously being refined, constructed and evaluated.

A key question is how best to advance the Rapid Deployment Capability (RDC) concept while keeping the African Standby Force as a main framework for African peace operations. From recent discussion in the UNSC it is clear that the Western and emerging powers see a strategic value in supporting the development of an African rapid deployment capability. The experiences of the past decade suggest that the AU needs to retain a high degree of flexibility so that it can continue to adapt to the highly dynamic and complex challenges it will be called upon to manage

Against the background of the gap between current conflict scenarios and the ASF concept, one such proposal is the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crisis (ACIRC). Now considered an interim measure, supported by around 15 African states, ACIRC comprises tactical battle groups of 1,500 military personnel deployed by a lead nation or a group of AU member states. Its purpose is to conduct stabilisation and enforcement missions, neutralise terrorist groups, and provide emergency assistance to AU member states. Unlike the ASF regional standby forces, the ACIRC is a purely military capability, without police or civilian elements. We argue that it is important to revise the ASF while simultaneously harmonising a rapid deployment capacity within it to ensure that all African peace operations are brought into a single continental-level institutional legal framework.

All the AU operations to date have been deployed amid ongoing conflict, with the aim of halting the conflict and stabilising the security situation. A fragile peace needs to be enforced by suppressing the capability of aggressors to use force for political purposes. Often, the only countries that are willing to contribute troops to such missions are those that have a strategic interest in the stability and post-conflict reconstruction of the country in question, but such interests also generate side-effects that need to be managed.

There is a need to develop both resilient African models and collaborative approaches

We will briefly discuss two of the challenges that are covered ▶

▶ in more detail in our book, namely levels of independent funding and the development of 'fit for purpose' politically-directed multidimensional (police and civilian components) stabilisation missions.

Firstly, in an effort to reduce the AU's financial dependency on external donors, the organisation has adopted a new funding mechanism. Starting in 2017, a new levy of 0.2 per cent on 'eligible' imports to AU member states is expected to raise around $1.2 (€1.08) billion. This should enable member states to fully cover the costs for the functioning of the AU Commission as well as 75 per cent of its programmes and 25 per cent of its peace and security budget. The AU budget for 2017 is approximately $700 (€634) million, and how the remaining $500 (€453) million raised will be used is still being worked out. Part of it may go to a contingency fund and the rest to the RECs/RMs and member states. The AU has also approved a proposal by its Special Envoy for the Peace Fund, Dr Donald Kaberuka, that the AU Peace Fund be revitalised and become the central vehicle for all peace and security expenditure of the AU.

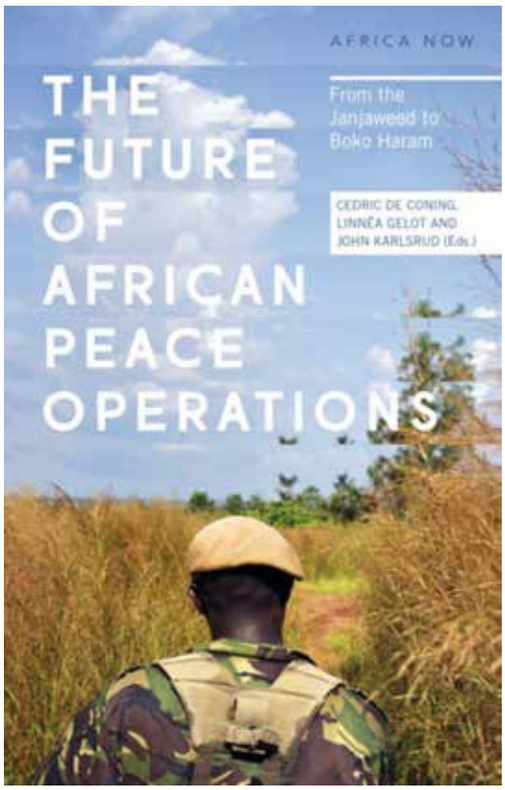
African peace operations are funded and supported in part by the AU, African troop and police-contributing countries (TCCs, PCCs) and, in the case of the Ebola mission (Aseowa), by African private sector donations. Some sub-regions, like the Economic Community of West Africa (Ecowas) have been able to support their own missions through community levies. The Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) operation against Boko Haram is an example of an African operation that has been mostly self-funded. To date, however, approximately 90 per cent of the AU's programme and peace and security budget has been funded by external partners.

A more sustainable and transparent funding framework, based on African revenues, will provide a more predictable source of funding. It will also significantly alter the ownership dynamics and the independence of African-led peace operations.

Another element of discussion is the conditions under which the AU can expect the UN and other partners to contribute up to 75 per cent of the costs of African peace operations authorised by the UN. The AU argues that such operations are carried out on behalf of the UN, which has primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, so the UN should bear the bulk of the costs.

Secondly, stabilisation cannot be achieved through military means alone. Conflicts are at their core political, and their resolution requires political solutions. Civilians and police experts can help secure and sustain the peace by supporting strengthening of the rule of law, security sector reform, transitional justice and civilian administration, laying the foundation for good governance and sustaining the peace.

To achieve this, the roles of civilians and police in mission planning at the AU Peace Support Operations Division (PSOD) should be reinforced, and more civilian and police capacity should be added at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of African peace operations. Future African missions are likely to continue to be robust in nature and must include a casualty tracking cell, such as the one developed for the African Union Mission in Somalia (Amisom), as well as other instruments that help to minimise harm against civilians and ensure compliance with AU and international humanitarian law and human rights frameworks.



Read more about these and other strategic policy recommendations in the book The Future of African Peace Operations*: From the Janjaweed to Boko Haram, edited by Cedric de Coning, Linnéa Gelot and John Karlsrud, published in March this year with Zed Books*

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The African experiences show that regional political leadership of peace operations and emergency responses is critical for effectiveness, sustainability and legitimacy. The AU's capabilities to undertake conflict prevention, conflict management and crisis response operations need to be further strengthened. The political dimension of these operations must be placed at the core of the mandate and mission; the planning, strategic management and evaluation of these missions must be strengthened; the civil-military relationship must find a healthier balance; the principal goals of providing timely protection, emergency assistance, and sustainable approaches need to be operationalised: and the AU must significantly improve its ability to support its own missions, both financially and logistically.

We therefore back the argument by Haysom and Pedersen, who argue that the humanitarian sector will have to commit new resources to relationship building on the continent, and step up existing engagement on protecting a distinct humanitarian identity in conflict zones. They draw on numerous examples from CAR and Somalia to make the case that robust response is perhaps the best available mission type in current geopolitical circumstances, but often one that compounds already acute challenges for humanitarian actors, including the tendency among donors and multilateral organisations to incorporate humanitarian operations into state-building efforts, the intended/unintended negative effects of partisan regional states using military means to address political crises, and the 'criminalisation of negotiations with non-state actors'.

The operational procedures used by humanitarian actors working alongside African peace operations need to retain their independence and distance, yet at the same time be realistic about the mutual dependencies. More civil-military lines of communication across all responding agencies and actors will be necessary, even if each separate actor will wish to retain its 'neutral' identity. Humanitarian organisations need to improve dialogue with the AU (RECs /RMs) and with key African troop-contributing states. C•RJ

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