

African-Led Peace Support Operations in a declining period of new UN Peacekeeping Operations

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Abstract

The United Nations is known to be the preeminent body to authorize and oversee international peacekeeping missions; however, new forms of African-led Peace Support Operations (PSOs) are increasingly common, innovative, and context-specific. This paper examines the evolution of African-led PSOs and argues that African-led PSOs are filling a vacuum and taking on responsibilities once assumed by the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UN PKO). The paper posits that the rise of African-led PSOs is due to the growing need for security and respond to the changing nature of conflict, the spread of insecurity and terrorism, and cross-border violence. Finally, the paper explores the implications of these operations for future missions in Africa, arguing that the future of African-led PSOs may be the preferred choice, with Regional Economic Communities and Ad-hoc Security Initiatives leading the way.

Keywords

African-led PSOs – African Union – United Nations peacekeeping operations – RECs – Ad-hoc Security Initiatives

1 Introduction

After the collapse of communism and the Cold War in the later 1980s, many African states moved towards democracy, which involved a wave of leadership changes in the 1990s. Some states like Benin, Zambia, Mali, and Nigeria went through civil society-led changes. In contrast, others had military regimes that

were eventually reformed and held elections. The changes during this period contributed to democratic gains across the continent, but many African states remained very much elite-led. In addition, challenges such as interstate conflicts, often involving insurgency groups who resisted the state politically, persisted. During this period, ongoing forms of insecurity would evolve outside of the geographical centre of states which impacted the role of peacekeeping missions. For multilateral organizations like the United Nations (UN), the increasingly complex and multidimensional peacekeeping mandates were also confronted with diminishing human and financial resources. This required the UN to realign itself in order to better respond to crisis. Part of this realignment required the UN to revisit how it approached multidimensional peacekeeping operations (PKO).¹ One attempt to adapt came from the Brahimi Report, representing the first comprehensive effort to identify and address the technical problems (including a lack of resources, logistical and financial problem) with UN PKOs and a move away from state-focused approaches.² As a result, the UN would focus its PKOs on keeping the peace where there was peace to be kept. It represented a stark focus on ceasefire agreements but ensured that the UN's efforts (PKOs, peacebuilding and peacemaking) were focused on safeguarding these agreements.

Despite the UN's efforts, many African states and their societies were still riddled with growth-hindering difficulties such as conflict, corruption, political isolation, economic underdevelopment, urban and rural divisions, state capture by elites and ethnic bigotry. Alongside these challenges, during the early 1990s, the then President of the United States, Bill Clinton, issued the PDD-25 Presidential Decree, which sought to limit UN PKOs on the African continent after the Somali debacle in 1993,³ indirectly contributing to the UN peacekeeping debacle in Rwanda six months later. In addition to this, some African leaders were not keeping to the democratic reform process or peace agreements. As a result, many states would see the rise of new resistance towards the states through violent and extremist political views.

During this period, terrorist groups, like the Maitatsine Islamic group in Nigeria and the Armed Islamic Group in Algeria, began to surface. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in the United States and the subsequent War on Terror campaign, several international Islamic extremist groups increased their operations in Africa. In some cases, Islamic extremist groups found a footing

1 De Coning 2022.

2 UN General Assembly 2000.

3 Presidential Decision Directives 1994.

in places with long-standing grievances, isolation, center-periphery, and economic underdevelopment, and economic and political marginalization based on ethnic, religious, and socio-political identities. Significantly, much of the destabilization in the Sahel resulted from heavily armed and skilled fighters from General Muammar Qaddafi's Libya, who spilled over into Mali after his death. This resulted in emerging conflicts in Africa evolving from rebel-led civil wars designed to take over control of the state (1980-the 90s) to insurgent conflicts (2000s) designed to partition and isolate portions of the territory of a state(s) as part of a new caliphate that rejected and ignored state boundaries. Consequently, the nature of African conflict(s) today increasingly involves insurgents and violent extremists fighting the state. These are often accompanied by terror organizations targeting government installations, coercing populations, deploying indiscriminate violence as a strategic tool, and even slaughtering civilians—especially in rural areas to cause terror on the population and undermine the legitimacy of the state.⁴ The new conflict actors differ from the freedom fighter periods of the 1960s. These are not groups with political wings or a purpose per se. These groups are located across borders and set up base in regions where government officials are non-existent. Most conflict actors previously focused on taking over or fighting for a stake in the state. These new actors are focused on taking complete control over areas and operating across borders, while mixing banditry, illicit finance, and indiscriminate violence as a strategy. This has meant that the UN's blue helmets were presented with new operational challenges.⁵

In response, the UN, and the African Union (AU) authorized new international interventions to protect the displaced and often persecuted populations and state agents from these aggressors. These new interventions are often comprised of enforcement operations and tasks which require a "green posture" where units must be stealthy, attack with surprise and need special forces who operate behind the lines.⁶ These new interventions and operations differ fundamentally from peacekeeping doctrine in several ways. First, these operations were uniquely African, with a lead nation or a regional block responding to a crisis. Second, the operations were not deployed based on the parties' consent following a ceasefire or peace agreement, instead they only required the host state's consent. Third, the operations were no longer impartial, as they were deployed to protect the state and its people against an iden-

4 Ruggeri, Gizelis, and Dorussen, 2013.

5 Findley and Young 2012; Findley, Piazza, and Young 2012; Fortna 2008; Polo and Gleditsch 2016.

6 De Coning, 2015.

tified aggressor. In some ways, this legitimized the state's actions. Finally, the use of force (enforcement operations or peace enforcement operations) was no longer restricted to self-defense. In essence, these operations were then authorized to use force to protect civilians and the state and were encouraged to do so proactively, not only to protect civilians under attack or in the face of imminent danger. As a result, peacekeepers had to change their approach to dealing with this insecurity and adjust to the new environments where this insecurity continued to thrive. This, in part, led to an increase in the number of deployments by the UN and the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau. These operations were followed by AU missions in Burundi (2003) and Darfur (2004).⁷

In the UN context, these new African-led PSOs were framed as stabilization operations, deployed to enforce forms of stability, influenced by changes in the global order, threats to regional stability, spillover effects and new conflict dynamics. However, with a global recession (in 2008), changing global order, great power rivalry manifesting in a reduction in the deployment of new UN PKOs⁸ deployment, there has been a focus on supporting African-led PSOs from within the UN. As a result, the AU, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) or groups of African states and their operations represented African-led missions that were based on different peacekeeping principles than those characterized by the UN PKOs—In the UN PKO context, there have been UN-led and UN-authorized regional organizations and coalition deployments. The aim of these African-led PSOs changed from pursuing and consolidating peace agreements to disrupting and degrading the military advantage and capability of insurgent groups (often embedded amongst civilian populations). Consequently, African-led PSOs have adopted counterinsurgency-type doctrines and kinetic tactics at the mission level. However, the official doctrine and training have maintained a PKO and PSO doctrinal mentality this is designed to deal with non-conventional violence against civilians. In many ways, this has led multidimensional operations to serve as a substitute for state governance and security, bolstering the perceived state capacity and legitimacy in areas where the government cannot send forces.

Thus, African-led PSOs have evolved due to several drivers and shifts in regional and global dynamics, which have led to African PSO s filling a vacuum and taking on more responsibility. In addition, data reveals that by the 2010s,

7 De Coning 2017.

8 Dorussen, 2022.

top Troop/Police Contribution Countries (T/PCCs)⁹ in UN operations were from the continent where six of the twelve operations are based (the largest four are the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali and South Sudan).¹⁰ However, there has also been a reduction in the number of new UN PKO deployments where the UN has closed large peacekeeping missions in Côte d'Ivoire (2017), Liberia (2018), and Sudan (2020). It has replaced them with much smaller policing or political missions in line with its A4P program. The A4P programme emphasises the need for political solutions to conflicts and political support for ongoing missions of new missions with an increase in UN political missions.¹¹ Thus, African-led PSOs have come to demonstrate a more local, context-specific response to insecurity and a desire from member states to turn to more self-help options. Despite an innovative and creative search by African-led PSOs to overcome these issues there are many shortcomings of these operations including as a lack of resources, political differences between member states and regions, and lack of institutional capacity to plan, mobilize, and deploy forces.

The paper examines the evolution of African-led PSOs, exploring what a reduction of UN PKO means for these missions, the challenges these missions face and the future of African-led PSOs. The paper is divided into five parts. The first part examines the evolution of AU-UN partnership in peace operations and the evolution of African-led PSO, positing that three types of African-led deployments have emerged. These types include African Union-led missions utilizing aspects of the African Standby Force (ASF) concept; REC-led missions that act as more than just TCCs for the AU's ASF concept, and finally Ad-hoc Security Initiatives (ASIs). The second part analyses the challenges facing African-led PSOs. The third part explores the implications of these operations on African-led missions. The fourth part assesses the trajectory of African-led operations, and the final part provides concluding thoughts.

1.1 *The Evolution of AU-UN Partnership in Peace Operations*

In 1994, the African continent witnessed the paralysis of the international community to act timeously to prevent the genocide in Rwanda and address the horrific situations in Liberia and Sierra Leone. African leaders would set their eyes on reforming the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) into the AU by making provisions in Articles 4(h) and (j) of the Constitutive Act of the African

9 Weiss and Kuele 2019.

10 United Nations Peacekeeping Forces 2022.

11 Clayton, Dorussen and Böhmelt 2020.

Union (2000) to, among other things, enable the AU to use force, as a last resort, for the prevention of war crimes, grave violations of human rights and genocide.¹² At this point, the AU and other African conflict management mechanisms were built (or transformed) to respond to civil wars.

In West Africa, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) deployed PSOs to Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau to deal with conflicts often focused on contesting national power or, in some cases, for control over regions within states. For ECOWAS, its PSOs encompassed deploying peace enforcement operations to stop the raging civil wars. ECOWAS operations included joint activities with the UN designed to reduce violence and instability and produce environments that enable structural transformations and political stability.¹³ The UN PKOs were also intended to assist the implementation of a ceasefire and peace agreements in support of the host government. They were designed to place the state on a path from conflict to peace by providing security guarantees, political accompaniment and peace-and state-building support delivered through joint civilian-military operations and coordination mechanisms.¹⁴

The success of ECOWAS-led PSOs since the early 1990s encouraged the AU and the RECs/RMs to develop Africa's capacity to deploy and conduct PSOs of their own.¹⁵ African leaders felt it was essential to address the growing insecurity emerging across the continent. This resulted in the African Standby Force (ASF) initiative launched in 2003.¹⁶ The ASF and related initiatives increased over the two next decades resulting in higher African-led PSO capacity and the AU's deployment of eleven PSOs.^{17,18} Since then, three types of African-led deployments have emerged that were outside the ASF concept. The first is the AU-led PSO which includes African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), the African-led

12 Art. 4 of the Protocol on Amendments to the Constitutive Act of the African Union, adopted by the 1st Extra-Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union, Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), 3 February 2003. The Protocol shall enter into force thirty days after the deposit of instruments of ratification by a two-thirds majority of the Member States. The Protocol also amends Article 5 of the Constitutive Act to include the Peace and Security Council as one of the organs of the Union.

13 United Nations Peacekeeping 2017; Davis 1997; Regan, 2022.

14 Albrecht and Jackson 2014.

15 Darkwa 2017.

16 De Coning 2017.

17 De Coning, Gelot, and Karlsrud 2016.

18 The AU mission in Burundi (AMIB), the Central African Republic (MISCA and MOUACA), Comoros (AMISEC and MAES), Mali (AFISMA), Somalia (AMISOM and ATMIS) and Sudan (AMIS I and II).

International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) and the African Union Mission in Burundi (AMIB). The costs were borne by the TCCs and some EU and other external financings, and later rehatted as UN PKOs. The second is the RECs-led missions such as the ECOWAS missions in Sierra Leone and Liberia and, more recently, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) mission to Mozambique (SAMIM) and previously to Lesotho. Third, a coalition of states or coalitions of the willing operating inside, outside and across two RECs forming ASIs, which include missions such as the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force (G5S-JF). All three represent context-specific political African-led missions, including rapid deployment and increased agency for RECs/RMs and a collection of member states as critical actors.

These three types of African-led PSOs have developed several unique characteristics that have followed a similar trajectory to UN PKOs but have some variations from their initiation. Firstly, they were not deployed to implement ceasefires or peace agreements after violent conflict but were designed as peace enforcement operations intended to intervene amidst ongoing conflict. These missions would expose the limitations of UN doctrine, which preserves traditional peacekeeping principles of consent, impartiality and minimum use of force. Secondly, African-led PSOs were deployed to protect and support the state against identified aggressors. In later years, these aggressors were mostly violent extremists or local bandits with no clearly defined political motive. The MNJTF and G5S-JF, and the African Union Regional Task Force to Counter the Lord's Resistance Army (RCI-LRA) provide the clearest examples of this model of operation—designed to address insecurity linked with jihadism, banditry and cross-border challenges.¹⁹ Thirdly, the missions operated in support of and, where feasible, alongside host nation forces. This aligns with the AU constitutional order, designed to support and assist states back to stability through force if deemed necessary.²⁰ Consequently, African-led PSOs were taking on challenges and leading efforts to resolve these crises.

However, since the nature of conflicts (intra-state armed conflicts to violent extremism, terrorism and organized crime and banditry) continues to evolve, African-led PSOs (AU, RECs and ASIs) are increasingly being deployed to border areas and peripheral regions of states and are thus circumventing the ASF concept.²¹ These operations have moved from being designed to

19 De Coning, et al 2022.

20 Kioko 2003.

21 De Coning, et al 2022.

address political instability and election monitoring challenges to terrorism and violent extremism. While African-led PSOs have often been deployed to support the AU's Peace and Security Architecture in developing integrated capacities (civilian, police and military) in crises, some RECs now operate alone, often forming new security arrangements which do not initially seek the AU approval.²² Additionally, several African-led PSOs have drawn from the ASF concept and developed models allowing for crisis reaction. For example, African-led PSOs were not deployed to implement ceasefire or peace agreements after violent conflict but to intervene amidst ongoing conflict, to protect civilians (Darfur) or to stop a violent insurgency or insurrection (Somalia, CAR, Mali, Comoros). The knowledge gained from these PSO experiences has been supplemented with additional training from international and bilateral partners. It includes exposure to UN PKOs, all of which have allowed African-led PSOs to adopt kinetic strategies. Consequently, many of the T/PCCs deployed within African-led PSOs have been exposed to levels of counterinsurgency training which shapes their responses, but which is not always matched with the right equipment. The result is that these operations are often dependent on external support. African-led PSOs have deployed strategies that are “fundamentally an armed political competition with the insurgents,” where success hinges on disrupting the counterinsurgent’s ability to win over the local population.²³ By deploying strategies such as the “winning hearts and minds” approach and the prioritization of the defence of civilians over the targeting and destruction of enemy forces, African-led PSOs typically deploy “clear-hold-build.” tactics²⁴ Counterinsurgency (COIN) strategies are designed to be population-centric.²⁵ These alterations shape the types of response(s), the forces’ effectiveness, the formation of strategies for countering these groups, and the group’s responses to these approaches, remodelling the nature of African-led PSOs.

22 The Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) is an active regional peacekeeping mission operated by the Southern African Development Community (SADC). SAMIM was deployed on 15 July 2021 following approval by the Extraordinary SADC Summit of Heads of State.

23 United States Department of State 2009.

24 Part of this approach included separating insurgents from the population to provide security to civilians (“clear”); followed by defensive military operations and policing to deter the insurgents’ return (“hold”); culminating in assistance operations which promote economic, political, and human development (“build”). Harmonized with an information campaign that explains counterinsurgency forces’ military and political objectives, the strategy aims to set the stage for effective governance over the long term.

25 US Department of the Army, 2007; Galula 1964; Kilcullen 2009.

1.2 *Challenges Facing African-Led PSOs*

The UN's collaboration with African-led PSOs has developed and contributed to increasing the capacities of African-led PSOs, but several other shortcomings have emerged. First, African-led PSOs are almost exclusively focused on security, physical protection, and stability. In practice, the PSOs have disproportionately been militarized and need to be swifter in their adaptive capacity to support civilian aspects needed to sustain peace. Even though many African-led PSOs are modelled on the ASF concept, which adopts a multi-dimensional PSO concept, the non-military dimensions of the ASF concept receive little attention during operations, remaining predominantly hard security focused. Second, with the emergence of ASIs, there are TCCs taking part in more than one mission at once, stretching their resources and capacity. For example, Chad is part of the G5S-JF, MNJTF, United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and collaborates with ongoing Takuba Task Force and collaborated with former French Operation Barkhane.²⁶ This means that while their responses are quick at the start, their engagement can indirectly contribute to changing the nature of conflicts instead of stopping the violence.²⁷ Furthermore, this can restrict the forces' ability to sustain gains over long periods, especially when the right equipment is lacking. Third, despite serious efforts by African-led PSOs to develop police and civilian capacities, including deploying civilian experts and police officers, African-led PSOs have struggled with civil-military coordination. As mandating authorities recognized the political nature of these operations, nearly all African-led PSOs have been civilian-led (led by a civilian and not by military personnel). Many were eventually augmented with either civilian staff or a parallel political mission or initiative, such as the Regional Strategy for Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience (RS-SRR) in the Lake Chad Basin, which included deploying civilian experts and police officers.

Fourth, African-led deployments have required considerable external assistance, which has resulted in heavy dependence on external funding. Note that SAMIM, created in 2021, is the most recently deployed mission that has been self-sustained and funded by its TCCs beyond the first 30 days.²⁸ Fifth, the overall integration of the peace process's political, governance, security, and socio-economic development dimensions in African-led PSOs still needs to be included. In essence, the mandates of these missions do not match the missions' capabilities, resources, and capacity (especially during the initial years

26 TchIE 2023.

27 Aning 2007.

28 TchIE and Anin 2022.

of deployment). Fundamentally, the positions these political bodies adopt, and the ongoing political and strategic guidance they provide to these missions once deployed are not matched.²⁹ Finally, AMISOM demonstrates the continued need to evaluate the value of using neighboring countries in deployments where their participation is decisive. In fact, neighboring states can be a source of additional tension.³⁰ This disharmony was found in the case of Somalia and often compounded by the involvement of Somalia's neighbors as TCCs (Kenya and Ethiopia). Both countries became hybrid fixtures of ongoing operations, both as TCCs to AMISOM and unilateral actors embroiled in an increasingly regionalized conflict economy. This matter will need to be clarified due to the increasing number of ASIs,³¹ and the deployment of SAMIM, East African Community Regional Force to the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (EACRF-DRC), and the recently announced Multinational Joint Task Force of the Accra Initiative.³²

1.3 *Implications for Future Missions*

In CAR, the DRC, Mali and Somalia, the state is controlled by one faction of elites and contested by others. At the same time, a long history of center-periphery political and economic marginalization and exclusion exists, and those from the periphery have legitimate grievances that extremists can exploit—the lack of essential services, governance, and economic development. Consequently, even if these states defeat violent extremist groups by military means, the approach fails to address their grievances. This dynamic creates unintended consequences and can increase the perception of exclusion and marginalization and contribute to the changing nature of the conflict. Subsequently, isolating the mission and its mandated task contributes to the protracted status of many conflicts.

This is particularly dangerous for African-led PSOs since these operations depend on partner funding, essentially giving away the ability to independently decide where and when to start and end a mission, and the scope of the mission. While there has been an active effort to move towards an effective AU-UN partnership with the use of UN-assessed contributions through a common

29 Each task given to the mission(s) requires different force capabilities, resources, and training. This means that most missions must constantly adapt their training, support, and capacity. However, vague terminology, lack of unified training and common doctrine can encourage the unhelpful tendency of different national forces to lead to diverse interpretations of their mandates in different ways.

30 UN Security Council Resolution 1725. 2006.

31 De Coning et al. 2022.

32 Security Council Report 2022.

African position, this will still cripple African-led PSOs since the AU's engagement is dependent on UN DPKO regular channels. This in turn makes the AU dependent on the UN's budget and resources. Therefore, the future of African-led PSOs needs to move towards a funding model that utilizes external funding only in the most extreme cases and only where there is a clear shared interest between the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the AU Peace and Security Council (AU PSC). The African-led PSOs should build up and focus on utilizing the \$400 million Peace Fund target to deploy small operations to stabilize situations over shorter periods. Relying on forces provided by African TCCs at their own expense would also address this issue. While \$400 million will not be enough long-term, it allows the AU to deploy selective operations in shorter time frames, allowing for better synergy with RECs/RMs and future ASIs to take over. Finally, African-led PSOs risk creating a path dependency which impacts the AU engagement with host states, impacting its ability to fully engage and its legitimacy to resolve or play a meaningful role in determining the challenges affected by states. In some cases, this has led to the AU being side-lined and regional bodies or member states going at it alone to circumvent the AU.

1.4 *The Future of African-Led Operations*

The growing trend of deploying African-led PSOs assumes a legitimate government and an illegitimate insurgency. Therefore, African-led PSOs support the government and operate alongside the host state. Yet, this means that in the eyes of the people, the operation may come up against legitimacy issue(s), as it is viewed as supporting a dishonest state. Thus, although the UN and AU may help to provide stability and security for the government of the day, current and future African-led PSOs should work with the government to address the drivers of the conflict, including those aspects that the ruling elites may be reluctant to acknowledge and address. This means that African-led PSOs should be recognized as a temporary measure that allows the necessary conditions for political processes to be set up. Operations must run concurrently with a strategy to put in place a political process that integrates peace processes, political governance, security, and socio-economic development dimensions. These are all part of an adaptive stabilization approach that will help to provide synergy and collaborative solutions. This implies developing a resilient analysis, planning capabilities and force generation capacity that can respond to any challenge that PSOs may face. As a result, the future of African-led PSOs should include a deeper partnership between the UN, AU, and RECs on the ground through support offices and missions.

2 Conclusion

African-led PSOs have demonstrated a wealth of experience, skills, capacity and knowledge despite the limited resources and funding. They continue to be used across the African continent to stabilize crisis and environments where there is no peace to be kept. In considering the last 75 years, African-led PSOs have developed unique paths and instruments. These responses to African insecurity differ from UN PKO doctrine and, in turn, have led to the AU and RECs/RMs, and member states taking on more work and responsibility. However, for African-led PSOs to succeed, they must prioritize effective force generation and explore a vast pool of potential member states to provide much-needed resources. African-led PSOs must have force capacity, logistical support, striking resources, the inclusion of female peacekeepers, local language speakers, police, and other civilian experts to succeed.

The future of African-led PSOs will rest on ensuring that these missions are not only using military tools. If not, they risk falling into the trap that many Western stabilization missions over the last two decades have scummed to, producing mixed results, and often leading to missions hastily pulling out without a clear exit plan. Thus, as long as the political processes are not seen as essential to end conflicts, many African societies will remain fragile. Consequently, African-led PSOs are at a unique point to not only adjust and adapt, but also become a key asset in dealing with future instability and continue to plug in a gap which the UN PKOs have not been fully successful in doing.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for further assistance from the editors of the special issue, comments and suggestions from colleagues at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), peer reviewer and our partners at the Training for Peace programme.

Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors reported no potential conflict of interest.

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