



FORCE COMMANDERS' ROUNDTABLE: COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE, COORDINATION AND CONVERGENCE IN AFRICAN PEACE OPERATIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) hosted a three-day long roundtable to discuss how the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), the United States (US) and African regional actors can advance peace operations in Africa. The roundtable convened approximately 50 participants, including nine former force commanders of peace operations in Africa, current and former mission heads, representatives from the AU and UN, and a diverse array of stakeholders and senior leaders from across the U.S. government. The roundtable offered participants the opportunity to discuss lessons learned from decades of peace operations experience, and to exchange ideas on how to improve the doctrine, cooperation mechanisms, and financing underlying Africa's peace and security architecture. The roundtable was particularly timely with the recent passage of UN Security Council Resolution 2719 (UNSCR 2719), offering participants an opportunity to exchange views on how to implement UN-assessed contributions to support future African-led peace operations.

The below read-out provides a summary of key insights from the roundtable and recommendations offered by participants. It does not reflect any consensus or official views of organizations or individuals present.

KEY INSIGHTS

The current era of UN-mandated stabilization missions in Africa is coming to an end. With no new large multidimensional UN missions authorized in close to a decade and the loss of host country consent of UN stabilization missions in Mali (MINUSMA) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), it was widely recognized by participants that an era characterized by large UN-mandated stabilization missions is ending. However, the UN still has a critical role to play in ensuring the continued success of peace operations by mandating, authorizing, funding, and providing logistical and financial support to missions undertaken by or in partnership with African nations. Future UN missions in Africa will likely have a smaller footprint and focus on traditional, proven peacekeeping principles: consent, non-use of force, and impartiality in pursuit of a peace agreement or political process.

African leadership is essential to the future of peace operations - inside and outside of Africa. Over the past three decades, the African Union, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and member states have collectively authorized 38 peace operations in dozens of countries. African troop contributing countries are likely to continue to take on a growing role

in peace operations not just in Africa, but as ‘exporters’ of expertise, advice, and troops to peace operations across the world. Within Africa, for more complex missions that focus on stabilization and peace enforcement, the role of the AU, RECs and regional actors is likely to continue to increase. So may the diversity of actors, entities, and modalities through which peace operations are authorized and implemented. Peace operations are also likely to continue to exist in a crowded security environment shaped by the influence of bilateral security cooperation and private security contractors.

The contributions of UN peacekeeping to African peace and security are immense and underappreciated. The decline in support for UN stabilization missions has more to do with the loss of host country and popular support than with a failure of these missions to achieve their mandates. Quantitative and qualitative evidence strongly suggests that on balance these missions have saved lives and reduced conflict. However, these data-rich analyses do not always resonate with local populations in today’s corroded information environment. It is vital that these achievements are captured and remembered so that the gap between the expectations associated with peace operations and the reality that they are effective but limited tools for conflict management is addressed in future missions.

Peace operations across Africa are facing an increasingly complex threat environment from capable and sophisticated armed groups. The threat environment in Africa has changed significantly. A nexus of organized criminal enterprises, violent extremist groups, and other non-state actors are threatening state authority using increasingly sophisticated technologies including improvised explosive devices (IEDs), drones, and disinformation campaigns. In some cases, these non-state armed groups have greater capabilities and are more experienced than the peace operations forces they confront. The mandates, training, equipment, and concepts of operations within peace operations need to adapt to confront this evolving threat.

The success of future peace operations in Africa lies in adapting the existing UN and AU architectures to more responsive, decentralized, regionally-centered models and approaches. The end of the era of UN-mandated stabilization missions provides an opportunity for innovation and adaptation in the models, modalities, and partnerships involved in peace operations. A major component of this new approach will involve more local and regional ownership over the authorization, mandating, and implementation of peace operations.

The robust application of three principles should form key criteria for future peace operations in Africa:

- **Host country consent.** It was recognized by participants that host country consent is vital to the success of peace operations, and missions have at times overstayed their welcome by becoming more wedded to the continuation of their presence than the host country. Maintaining host country cooperation should not require missions to compromise principles or limit mandates. Host countries should refrain from using the presence of peace operations as a scapegoat for failures in governance.
- **Popular support.** It was further recognized by participants that popular support for the mission and its mandate was an equally vital criteria for the success of

any peace operation. The withdrawal of widespread popular support and host country consent should lead missions to proactively revisit their mandate and reconsider their presence.

- **Pursuit of political settlements.** Participants emphasized the importance of the pursuit of political settlements, negotiations, and conflict prevention as vital to the success of peace operations. It was recognized that even missions with peace enforcement, counterterrorism, or stabilization components need to harmonize the use of force with softer approaches to reduce, prevent, or seek political settlements to armed conflict.

These principles do not serve to replace other principles that guide UN peacekeeping: consent of the parties, impartiality, non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate. Rather, they serve to highlight what preconditions need to be met to authorize and deliver on peace operations of all kinds. It was also noted by participants that without the proper training, equipment, and morale, troops deployed to peace operations will not be seen as credible either by the host nation or the populations they are meant to serve.

UN assessed contributions to AU-led peace operations (UNSCR 2719) are a major step forward and present a significant opportunity to adapt the existing peace operations architecture to contemporary armed conflict and geopolitical realities. UN-assessed contributions provide a potential template and a powerful new tool to inject much-needed resources, accountability, political support, and capabilities to African-led peace operations. To make the most effective use of this new tool, the UN, the AU, the RECs and bilateral partners will likely have to take additional measures to modify their institutions, regulations, and support for peace operations. It is critical that these key actors have a mutual understanding of what the conceptual and procedural template for UNSCR 2719 looks like to ensure a clear division of labor.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. ***Military leaders and local actors need to inform the process through which future peace operations are mandated.*** Participants cited a significant number of challenges to peace operations stemming from poorly conceived mandates, which are often negotiated in capitals and are vague, overly politicized, unrealistic, or overly ambitious. Force commanders live with the results, as do local populations whose expectations about improved security are not fulfilled. While the process of mandating a peace operation is always going to be the responsibility of political leaders, peace operations mandates might be improved if there were mechanisms in place to ensure the expert advice of security force officers and a voice for local actors.
2. ***The AU and UN should further deepen their partnership to enable UNSCR 2719 implementation.*** This deepening should include more regular meetings between the AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC) and UNSC, a comprehensive assessment of how to leverage the comparative advantages of each organization, and an identification of how some UN capacities – such as civil affairs or the management of troop contributing countries – may be replicated by, transferred to, or conducted jointly with the AU. For

example, a joint AU-UN peacekeeping troop contribution coordination mechanism, led at the regional-level by African states with significant experience in peacekeeping, could help further expand African capacities to generate and sustain expeditionary forces.

3. ***African Union and RECs should expand their approach to force generation beyond the African Standby Force (ASF).*** Though it remains an important building block, the ASF remains a work in progress and does not reflect the wide array of modalities available to African states to generate troops to contribute to peace operations. Other complementary models for force generation that could be included in a revised AU doctrine include: a UN-like approach to recruiting TCCs, ad-hoc regional missions, anchor-state led missions, and the use of private military contractors.
4. ***Peace operations in Africa should redouble efforts to cultivate, sustain and maintain specialized air, drone, counter-IED, and intelligence capabilities.*** These specialized capabilities are crucial because they enable all that peace operations do – from their situational awareness to their ability to evacuate wounded troops to their ability to respond pro-actively to threats. Troop contributing countries (TCCs) capable of supplying specialized assets to peace operations should be expanded, as should bilateral assistance efforts to African countries who express an interest in supplying and sustaining these assets. Repurposed equipment donated by African TCCs as existing missions draw down could potentially supply some of these capabilities to ongoing and future peace operations. It is critical that any equipment procurement is paired with efforts to build local capacity and institutions necessary to maintain capabilities within the TCCs and the institutions responsible for peace operations. National strategies that enable TCCs to state clear objectives and end-states with respect to their contributions to peace operations could enable the sustained cultivation of these in-demand capabilities.
5. ***Include the contribution of specialized, in-demand capabilities and expertise as in-kind contributions under the auspices of UNSCR 2719.*** The contribution of in-demand air, ISR, and UAV equipment, capabilities, and expertise by African TCCs should be considered as in-kind contributions under UNSCR 2719. The UN should also look at options to incentivize the recruitment of women and gender sensitive capabilities by African PSOs by including them as in-kind contributions.
6. ***Ensure peacekeeping principles and rules of engagement do not prevent those deployed in the field from pro-actively responding to threats to their personnel or civilians.*** Participants broadly agreed that while the rules of engagement are flexible enough, their misinterpretation has at times endangered the safety of mission personnel and cost civilian lives. To protect civilians and prevent threats to mission personnel, more awareness needs to be instilled before and after deployment on expectations and acceptable instances for using force. Preventive self-defense actions in cases where there is a clear threat vector preparing to attack peacekeepers or local populations should be permitted without exception.
7. ***REC and regionally-led peace enforcement missions should work with the AU and the UN to adopt compliance frameworks to ensure oversight, accountability, respect for human rights, and the laws of armed conflict.*** The adoption of such frameworks could

lay the groundwork over the medium-long term for the use of UN-assessed contributions to support these types of operations.

8. ***Professional military education (PME) efforts related to peace operations should prioritize training on specialized capabilities and educating peacekeepers on the importance of their mission.*** Participants cited national loyalties, risk-aversion, and a lack of belief by peacekeeping units in the mission that they were tasked to undertake as a consistent problem. This issue could be partially addressed through education in mission or at peace operations training centers intended to foster *esprit de corps*, loyalty to peace operations objectives and principles, and understanding of the contributions of peace operations to global peace and security. In addition, TCCs and African PME institutions should focus on training officers in specialized intelligence, reporting, analysis and other technical skills currently in demand by peace operations.
9. ***Future AU-led and REC-led peace enforcement missions should adopt more robust civilian and non-military infrastructure.*** With a few exceptions, REC and regionally led peace operations lack the civilian expertise, policing, and civil affairs capabilities that could enable them to facilitate political settlements, conduct stabilization efforts, and address the underlying causes of armed conflict. While notable improvements have been made, bilateral support, multilateral support, and relatively successful efforts such as the Lake Chad Basin's Multinational Joint Task Force could inform future AU and REC-led efforts to better integrate their military capabilities with softer approaches to reduce and mitigate armed conflict. Specific opportunities for enhancing civil-military coordination include:
 - recruiting former officers serving in peacekeeping missions into civilian roles,
 - training civilians on the military aspects of peace operations (and vice versa),
 - loosening restrictions on allowing civilians to accompany military deployments to contested areas.
10. ***Peace operations of all kinds need to advance on ongoing efforts to recruit female military and civilian officials and adopt gender-sensitive practices.*** The UN has been a global leader in fostering the inclusion of women and gender sensitivity within its peace operations. These achievements should be carried forward into African-led missions financed by the UN, and include not just recruitment, but infrastructure and incentives that enable robust female participation in peace operations.
11. ***Key actors responsible for peace operations in Africa need to invest in enhancing strategic communications and adopt robust efforts to counter disinformation.*** The UN, AU, the RECs and other actors responsible for peace operations need to invest both in robust strategic communications and public affairs capabilities, as well as in partnerships with independent researchers, journalists, and media to investigate, identify, and respond to coordinated inauthentic behavior and foreign information manipulation efforts that aim to undermine confidence and credibility of peace operations. Leaders of peace operations should respond forcefully to attempts by host governments to undermine their credibility through the spread of disinformation, even if it means reconsidering their presence in a country.