



Enabling United Nations and Regional Organisations Partnerships in Africa - Priorities for the Future

Challenges Background Paper

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Context: Peacekeeping Overstretch

1. Today, all organisations engaged in peace operations are suffering from overstretch. This strain is the result of the dramatic expansion of worldwide peace operations during the last decade. At the end of the 1990s, the United Nations deployed some 20,000 peacekeepers and had a peacekeeping budget of ca. US\$ 1 billion per year. Ten years later, it fields ca. 120.000 personnel at a cost of ca. US\$ 7 billion per year. These increases were caused partly by the growth of the number of operations deployed and partly because operations have grown in scope from purely military tasks to include large police and civilian components and thus consumed more time, personnel and funds than originally foreseen. The operational capacities of other organisations such as the AU, EU, and NATO are under similar strains.

2. As a consequence, political pressure from both troop and police contributing countries and those nations bearing the financial burden is mounting to slow this growth or even scale back deployments. The recent discussions about the future of the missions in Sudan, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Timor-Leste, and Afghanistan provide evidence of this development. The world financial crisis will surely have an additional negative impact on the international willingness to enter into new commitments. At the same time, the demand for peace operations is unlikely to decrease in the near future.

Peacekeeping Partnerships to the Rescue?

3. Numerous ideas to tackle peacekeeping overstretch are currently being discussed. They include the accelerated drawing down (or closing) of seemingly successful operations; the realization of savings from streamlined procurement and logistics systems; and a shift from substantial military operations towards light political missions. Another approach that has attracted much attention is the possibility to utilize scarce resources more efficiently by improving the cooperation between different organisations. These so-called peacekeeping partnerships are not new. On the contrary, they have become the norm: roughly half of UN missions, over two-thirds of EU operations and all NATO ground-based operations are deployed with at least one partner organisation.

4. The legal basis for peacekeeping partnerships is to be found in the UN Charter. Chapter VIII acknowledges, particularly in Article 52(1) and (3), the scope for contribution of regional organisations to conflict resolution. But it also makes clear in Article 53(1) that this role is meant to be a supplement to UN capacities, not a substitute. This primacy of the UN and its Security Council in the global peace and security architecture has been recognized – at least in principle – by all other actors.

5. In the past, many of these inter-organisational cooperations were the result of (sometimes questionable) political considerations. Little thought was given to costs or practicability. In the current political and financial climate, this will certainly change. The future of existing joint operations and the authorisation of additional ones will depend on demonstrating that they can be both cost-effective and viable. At least in regard to costs, the UN and the AU individually already enjoy an advantage. Several studies have found evidence that their operations, while not cheap, are a bargain compared to those of other actors such as NATO or the EU. But can the UN and the AU work together efficiently?

The Advantages of Asymmetry: United Nations and African Union

6. That the two organisations need each other is beyond dispute. For two decades, African conflicts have been at the centre of the UN's attention: about three-quarters of UN military, police and civilian personnel are deployed in peace operations on this continent. These missions also account for three-quarters of the UN peacekeeping budget. Promoting peace and security as a prerequisite for development is of course also a primary concern of the AU. But the UN/AU partnership is not only based on common interests. It is also founded on shared values, mutually reinforcing legitimacy – and dependency on each other's resources. The two sides also show strengths and weaknesses that lead to distinct comparative advantages that have proven very fruitful in the past and could be even more productive in the future.

7. The AU possesses unrivalled local knowledge and legitimacy. Its member states have also shown the political will to authorise operations in high-risk environments. There exists, however, a considerable gap between the organisation's willingness and its ability to act. The AU has neither a predictable funding mechanism nor the capacities to independently sustain its missions. The UN, on the other hand, has unique experience and abilities to plan, deploy, and support large-scale peace operations. Crucially, it also has access to a reliable source of funding in the form of its assessed contributions. What it lacks is the political will to intervene in ongoing conflicts: UN peacekeepers can only go where there is "a peace to keep".

Patterns of Peacekeeping Partnerships in Africa

8. As a result of these strengths and weaknesses, a noticeable pattern has developed for peace operations in Africa: the AU specialises in the role as first responder, deploying risky "no-peace-to-keep" operations. The UN then either joins or takes over to concentrate on long-term peacekeeping and peacebuilding. This division of labour was first apparent in *Burundi*, when an AU mission (AMIB) established in 2003 was replaced by a UN operation (ONUB) one year later. It was repeated in *Darfur* where AMIS, deployed by the AU in 2005, was first supported logistically by the UN (and also the EU and bilateral donors) and then in 2008 transformed into the UN/AU hybrid mission UNAMID. The case of *Somalia* is slightly different. The situation in this country has remained so volatile that the UN has so far been

unable to deploy more than a small political office, UNPOS, operating from Nairobi. However, the AU operation in Somalia (AMISOM) receives vital financial, logistical and management support from the UN through a specialised support mission, the UN Support Office for AMISOM (UNSOA, also located in Nairobi).

9. Several lessons have emerged from these experiences, particularly from the two ongoing operations in Darfur and Somalia. First, it is clear that the AU remains dependent on external support to sustain its missions. Second, the AU and the UN have proven to be capable of devising new models of cooperation based on political necessities and the realities on the ground. Third, the process of setting up and the daily management of the joint efforts in UNAMID and AMISOM have led to considerable frictions between the two partners. These strains demonstrate that significant efforts still need to be made by both sides to improve their cooperation both on the political and strategic, and particularly on the management and operational level. The good news is that the UN and the AU acknowledge the gaps and are willing to work towards closing them and thus develop the full potential of their partnership.

Identifying the Challenges

10. Although UN/AU interaction started with the latter's establishment in 2002, the central pillar of their operational partnership has become the "Ten-Year Capacity Building Programme for the AU", endorsed by the UN General Assembly in November 2006¹. It was conceived to improve the coherence of the engagement of the entire UN system with the AU and also African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) across a wide range of subject areas, from peace operations to food security and environmental protection. Currently exactly at its midpoint, the programme was the subject of two recent reports by the Secretary-General² and a report by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS)³.

11. Together, the three reports provide not only an overview of past and ongoing activities, but, more importantly, they also list the shortcomings of the collective effort. The following (severely condensed) catalogue can serve as a useful starting point for a discussion of challenges and possible solutions:

- No over-all strategic vision for the programme was developed.
- There remains a lack of clarity as to the channels of interaction and proper counterparts on the AU side.
- The assessment of AU needs was insufficient.
- An uncoordinated glut of actors has caused duplication of efforts and an overloading of limited AU human capacities.
- A focus on delivering project goals led to "capacity substitution" instead of capacity building.

Headquarters Level/Strategic Challenges

12. The Secretary-General has stated that "without a truly strategic relationship and clear guidance, our efforts to work together will continue to be short-term, ad hoc, more

¹ A/61/630, 16.11.2006,

² A/65/510 – S/2010/514, 14.10.2010, and A/65/716 – S/2011/54, 02.02.2011,

³ A/65/762, 28.02.2011

complicated and often more costly”⁴. This strategic relationship and guidance can only be achieved through constructive interactions of the UN Security Council and its counterpart in the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)⁵, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC). The importance the UN attaches to African security can be gauged from the fact that the PSC is the only political body with which members of the Security Council hold annual meetings, which started in 2007. However, these meetings have so far largely focused on procedural rather than substantive matters. There have been lengthy discussions, for instance, on the question of whether the PSC is meeting with *the* UN Security Council or rather just *the members* of the UN Security Council.

13. The issues of primacy and subsidiarity underlying this disagreement are serious and need to be worked out if the annual meetings are to promote a common strategic vision. What is needed is a framework that answers the questions of why, when, and how the UN and AU will work together in peace operations. It remains to be seen what the added value of the UN-AU Joint Task Force on Peace and Security (JTF)⁶ in this context will be. As in other venues of UN/AU cooperation, the three JTF meetings so far held have suffered from a lack of senior AU participants, caused by human resource bottlenecks.

14. An important step to improve the relationship between two other key bodies, the UN Secretariat and the AU Commission, was recently taken with the inauguration in February 2011 of the UN Office to the African Union (UNOAU). It integrates four formerly separate UN presences in Addis Ababa: the UN Liaison Office; the AU Peace and Support Team; the UN Planning Team for the AU Mission in Somalia⁷; and the administrative functions of the Joint Support and Coordination Mechanism for the AU-UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur. Even at this early stage of its existence, it appears that UNOAU has already made interactions between New York and Addis Ababa considerably smoother.

Field Level/Operational Challenges

15. On the operational level, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Field Support (DFS) have for several years assisted the operationalization of the African Standby Force (ASF), a critical component of APSA. The military units constituting the ASF are to be provided by AU member states and to be trained and deployed in brigade-size units by five RECs⁸. A significant amount of training, supported by DPKO and DFS, has been conducted in the regions, and the AU as well as the regional planning elements are now functional. Full operational readiness of at least some brigades is expected for 2015.

16. Key challenges remain, however: the degree of advancement differs sharply between member states and from region to region; a rapid deployment capability as well as regional and AU management and support capacities are still missing; and the police and civilian components necessary for multidimensional peace operations lag far behind. Here is an

⁴ A/65/510 – S/2010/514, para 55

⁵ The other elements of APSA are the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS); the Panel of the Wise; the African Standby Force (ASF); and the Peace Fund.

⁶ JTF was established in September 2010, see A/64/359/ - S/2009/470

⁷ The UN Support Office for AMISOM (UNSOA) mentioned above remains a separate entity.

⁸ The units are: the East African Standby Force (EASF); the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Standby Force (ESF); the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) Standby Force; the North African Regional Capability (NARC) Standby Force; and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Standby Force (SSF).

opportunity for DPKO and DFS as they have unique experience in recruiting, training and supporting police and civilian elements in peace operations. Steps should be taken to tailor their activities to the actual needs of the AU and the RECs and in particular to coordinate them with those of other actors engaged in this area.

17. Another crucial requirement of the AU is enhanced logistics capabilities. DSF continues to share its knowledge in this field with AU Commission staff in preparation for the establishment of an AU logistics base at an undetermined point in the future. Until this becomes operational, some form of bridging mechanism is clearly needed. The UN is currently exploring the possibility of giving the AU access to facilities at the UN Logistics Base in Brindisi, Italy; to UN strategic deployment stocks; to existing UN system procurement contracts; to strategic airlift capacities; and to a surge capacity in the form of a small team of UN logistics experts for the critical mission start-up phase. These measures were in part already included in the recommendations of the report of the Joint UN/AU panel (the so-called “Prodi Report”) of December 2008⁹ and should be implemented as soon as possible.

18. DPKO has also scaled up its training activities in support of the AU and the RECs. These focus on expanding planning capacities, specific functional areas such as logistics and police operations, and preparing potential mission leaders for future deployments. In addition, DPKO is strengthening African capacities by working with African training centres and conducting train-the-trainers courses. The UN is also aware, however, that in the medium term the AU will need an in-house training facility. Hopefully, it will act on this insight and fully support its implementation.

Challenges to African Union Capabilities

19. Any discussion of AU capabilities must unfortunately start with money. To again quote the Secretary-General: “The issue of securing sustainable, predictable and flexible financing ... remains a key challenge”¹⁰. Although the AU in 2009 made the decision to increase assessments on member states to the African Peace Fund, it is clear that for the foreseeable future it will remain dependent on outside funding. This takes the form of voluntary, case-by-case contributions by international partners, in particular by the EU’s African Peace Facility and by UN assessed contributions. Although of course welcome, voluntary contributions have obvious drawbacks. They are volatile by nature and their acquisition channels AU staff time and energy into fund-raising activities.

19. In consequence, the AU PSC has repeatedly called on the UN to approve a general authorization of the use of UN assessed contributions for AU peace operations authorised by the Security Council. A similar recommendation was also included in the Prodi Report. The Security Council has on several occasions “recognized the need” for sufficient and predictable funding and agreed to “keep all options under considerations”. All parties agree that this is a highly unsatisfactory state of affairs but no one has been able to find a way forward. Given current – and probable future – global financial constraints, the deadlock will probably not go away soon. Yet it is imperative that the international community keeps exploring ways to secure “sustainable, predictable and flexible” financing for AU operations.

⁹ S/2008/813, 24.12.2008

¹⁰ A/65/510 – S/2010/514, para 42

20. The second key stumbling block to improving AU readiness for peace operations lies in the limits of its human capital. Staff numbers, internal organisations and professional expertise all leave room for improvement. Practitioners on both sides are aware of this problem, in fact AU staff have in many different forums highlighted the “absorptive capacity” of AU institutions as a primary area of concern. It must also be mentioned, however, that the uncoordinated approach to capacity building by a plethora of competing international actors has not helped. It appears that at least in some cases, highly qualified AU staff spend more time liaising and being mentored than actually doing their job. This is not a criticism of liaison and mentoring activities as such. Both are valuable tools for capacity building – but they need to be used in a coherent and targeted manner.

21. In some instances, the form of UN engagement has also raised the question of ownership. The OIOS report admits: “there were cases where their [DPKO and DSF] support to the African Union Commission was to function as a substitute capacity. This support was much valued and met the immediate needs of the current field missions; it did not, however, necessarily lead to a sustained incremental improvement in the capacity of the Union”¹¹. This dilemma is, of course, familiar to all practitioners in the field of peace operations and development cooperation. There are cases when it cannot be completely resolved. However, designing support activities with an explicit focus on local ownership and training UN staff in mentoring and advising techniques are possible remedies.

22. Finally, it is important to note that the AU has recently undertaken a comprehensive reform effort, targeting its financial department and staffing. As a result, financial management, accountability and reporting have significantly improved. The AU is also tackling its endemic personnel problems. Over the last five years Commission staff has grown to about 1.500 (at the AU’s establishment in 2002, staff size was set at 675). A review is now underway to ensure that staffing structures are better aligned with core Commission tasks and also the structures of key partner organisations.

23. The examples given above illustrate two things: On the one hand, many intractable, systemic obstacles have to be overcome before the UN/AU partnership in peace operation in Africa can become truly effective. On the other, political will from above and a daily commitment to finding workable solutions at the working level make it possible to clear them away, one by one. Political will in multilateral organisations, however, can only ever be as strong as their member states allow it to be. Member states, therefore, also need to put their weight behind strengthening the UN/AU partnership.

Recommendations

Strategic level

1. Create a strategic framework or common vision for cooperation (“why, when and how?”) and a *detailed roadmap* for implementation

Field level

2. Provide coherent, well-coordinated support to ASF, particularly its *police* and *civilian* components
3. Establish in-house AU *training* capacities

¹¹ A/65/762, para 72

4. Improve AU *logistics* capabilities by providing access to UN logistics infrastructure and experience

Capacity building

5. Keep exploring ways to secure “sustainable, predictable and flexible” *financing* for AU operations, either through UN assessed contributions or some alternative mechanism
6. Streamline capacity building measures by improving needs assessment and *coordination* between different providers (UN, EU, NATO, bilateral actors), including at the sub-regional and member state level
7. Promote understanding of the inner workings and organisational culture of the partner through staff exchanges and “learning days”.