

Peacekeeping in Africa: The Importance of the Regional?

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Summary

Violent conflict continues to be a drain on Africa economically, and a disruption politically. Efforts at conflict prevention and peacekeeping have grown in scale with the UN firmly in the lead in the latter with substantial missions in Mali, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The African Union Peace and Security Architecture continues to develop with the aspiration to replace the UN as the focus for peace and security in Africa. Key to the African Union's success will be its relationships with the regional organisations within the continent although the development of these is inconsistent. Whilst ECOWAS continues to develop strongly in West Africa for example, North Africa regional organisations generally remain underdeveloped. Given the continuing need to build peace and security across Africa, perhaps the focus at this time should switch from the regions to the state with the African Union acting as a broker in bringing together 'coalitions of the willing'?

Introduction

Whilst there are many positive social and economic developments on the African continent, conflict remains widespread disrupting that economic potential and impoverishing the lives of millions. It is perhaps unsurprising then that Africa remains the focus for much of the world's efforts at peacekeeping with substantial missions centred on Mali, the Central African Republic (CAR), South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as well as in Somalia and Darfur. Spill overs from these as well as other local conflicts impacts on neighbours and regional networks such that efforts at conflict prevention and conflict management are widespread. Whilst the UN remains at the heart of efforts to reduce the impact of conflict globally there is increasing attention being paid to the role of regional organisations. Indeed, after a year in charge, the agenda of the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres is becoming clearer and the focus is unsurprisingly on the need for more focus

on smaller missions aimed at preventing conflict rather than the big multi-dimensional missions mainly found in Africa and highlighted above.¹ In particular there is a sense of frustration amongst some in New York that some of these large missions arise from the failure of initial efforts led by the African Union (AU) and that the smaller missions in turn need a more regional focus.

So what are the challenges and opportunities of developing policies that embrace that regional focus? Having outlined the challenges that confront peacekeeping and peacemaking in Africa, this paper will consider the development of the AU Peace and Security Architecture and its relationship to the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). These are the key foundations for the delivery of activity under that Architecture but reflect the highly varied nature of development across the continent.

1. Novosseloff A and Boutellis A (2017), UN Peace Operations and Guterres's Reform Agenda, IPI Global Observatory, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/11/un-peace-operations-guterres-reform-agenda/> (accessed 21 Mar 2018).

Having considered how the structures are developing with a focus on peacekeeping, the paper will move on to consider whether approaches to dealing with some of the contemporary challenges embraced by the UN have any potential to address the issues before outlining the strengths and weaknesses of an approach based on the sub-continental regional organisations.

Contemporary Peacekeeping

At the heart of the debates around contemporary peacekeeping is the challenge of acting when there is no, or at least very little, peace to keep. Traditional peacekeeping was largely based on contexts where there was some form of agreement between the parties to the conflict and where peacekeepers acted with consent and with impartiality. This model really started to unravel with the apparent failings of peacekeeping in Rwanda and the Balkans in the 1990s where peacekeepers were unable to protect civilians from organised violence and indeed were not mandated to do so. Whilst initially this saw a decrease in enthusiasm and engagement from the international community in such missions, the early 21st century has seen them grow in number, scale and complexity. Missions have increasingly complex mandates that move beyond supporting arrangements for peace to endeavouring to enforce peace as part of missions that also seek to contribute to conflict prevention through the rebuilding of societies.

In South Sudan the UN mission, UNMISS was established as the country declared independence in July 2011 with a mandate to assist the Government with consolidating peace in order to foster long-term state building and development.² From the outset there were tensions with the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) as to the extent of UNMISS activities and how these related to the country's efforts to establish its sovereignty. When civil war broke out in 2013, UNMISS found itself caught between the various parties to the conflict as it attempted to protect civilians caught up in the fighting. It has thus been accused by both GoSS and opposition leaders of collusion and has found the implementation of the revisions to its mandate extremely challenging.³ Whilst New York has attempted to improve the performance of the Mission, most notably by removing the Force Commander, a Kenyan General

after perceived failings during an outbreak of fighting in Juba this has not necessarily enhanced performance and indeed led to the withdrawal of the Kenyan contingent.⁴ The case of UNMISS emphasises the need for political solutions to be at the heart of peacekeeping missions and the central involvement of the East African REC the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in the peace process highlights the potential benefits of a local lens on conflict.

In contrast, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was established in 2013 after a Tuareg rebellion in the north of the country became enmeshed with an Islamist insurgency leading to a coup in the Malian army. This brief summary only begins to outline the complexity of the conflict situation that has beset the country since 2012. MINUSMA was established to replace an initial African-led peacekeeping response, the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) which came together under the leadership of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) the REC of which Mali was a member. The mandate of MINUSMA is much broader than that of a traditional UN PK mission in assisting the Malian authorities with ensuring security, stabilization and protection of civilians; supporting national political dialogue and reconciliation; and assisting the reestablishment of State authority, the rebuilding of the security sector, and the promotion and protection of human rights in that country.⁵ At the same time as having this extensive mandate, MINUSMA has proved a particularly dangerous mission with some 160 fatalities amongst peacekeepers from suicide attacks and roadside bombs amongst other causes.⁶ This is reflected in peacekeepers being issued with some of the most robust rules of engagement even seen on a UN Mission including authority to use all necessary means to ensure the implementation of the mandate. It is of further note that whilst the UN took over the mission from ECOWAS as it had previously done with other African led peacekeeping missions, African contingents still contribute a substantial component of both police and military personnel to the Force.

The recognition by both the UN and its member states of the many challenges facing peacekeeping have been reflected in a series of reviews from the Brahimi Report

2. UNMISS Mandate from UNSCR 1996, <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/mandate> (accessed 21 March 2018).

3. ODI Report January 2017 <https://odihpn.org/magazine/the-mixed-record-of-un-peacekeeping-in-south-sudan/> (accessed 21 March 2018).

4. Lawson E (2016), The Politics of Peacekeeping, <https://rusi.org/commentary/politics-peacekeeping-it-long-way-london-juba> (accessed 21 March 2018).

5. MINUSMA Mandate and Background, <https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/mandate-0> (accessed 21 March 2018).

6. UN Peacekeeping Fatalities data, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/fatalities> (accessed 21 March 2018).

in 2000, through the Peace Operations Review in 2006 to the High Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) in 2015, substantial efforts have been made to ensure that UN peacekeeping remained effective and relevant.⁷ More recently at a Summit in London, the UK Government introduced the idea of the '3 Ps of Peacekeeping'. This focused efforts on improving the Planning of peacekeeping missions to ensure that they are more effective recognising that the short-lead times associated with the need to respond to crises meant that sometimes it was necessary to deliver the mandate with the troops available to the UN. This in turn linked to an improved system of Pledges of police and soldiers from member states to enable a catalogue of capabilities to be available to those undertaking the planning. Lastly, given concerns about the conduct of certain troop contingents and in particular allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), there was a commitment to improve the Performance of peacekeepers. This last was backed by a promise to remove under-performing contingents and leaders from missions.⁸ Whilst these technical aspirations were clearly important, they failed to address two of the key issues identified as critical to success in contemporary peacekeeping operations: politics and people. However, if UN-led efforts at peacekeeping in Africa are facing a range of significant challenges, what opportunities are there for the African Union and the RECs to play a more substantive role?

The African Union Peace and Security Architecture

The African Union Peace and Security Architecture (AUPSA) is a key element in the AU's unlikely to be realised aspiration to end violent conflict on the continent by 2020.⁹ At the centre of the AUPSA is the AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC). Whilst this has some resemblance to the UN Security Council, it comprises 15 members none of whom are permanent or have a veto. All members are elected by the AU Executive Council and endorsed by the Assembly with representation agreed regionally.¹⁰ This

regional representation is also reflected in the 'Panel of the Wise' which comprises 5 members appointed by the Assembly from 'highly respected African personalities of high integrity and independence who have made outstanding contributions to Africa in the areas of peace, security and development'.¹¹ The Panel primarily seeks to undertake mediation roles to prevent or manage conflict in Africa in support of the PSC and has contributed in the past to brokering peace in post-election violence in Kenya and disputes between Sudan and South Sudan.

A further key element of the AUPSA is the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), at the heart of which is a 24 hr manned observation and monitoring centre in Addis Ababa which seeks to identify both structural and proximate causes of violent conflict.¹² It is supposed to be supported in this endeavour by parallel organisations at the regional level but the development of these has been highly varied which reflects the major challenge to a regional focus within the AUPSA. Despite the recognition that conflict prevention is a much more effective policy approach than belated intervention, some analysts have highlighted that even where CEWS has highlighted concerns political denialism and a lack of political will to deal with certain crises.¹³

Whilst there are other organs of the AU which contribute to the AUPSA such as the Post-Conflict Reconstruction and development Unit and the Mediation Support Department, perhaps the most visible element is the African Standby Force and it is here that the RECs arguably become most important.

The African Standby Force

The African Standby Force (ASF) was designed to be a tool to allow the PSC to intervene in a timely fashion to outbreaks of violent conflict across the continent. Its roots lie in the ASF Policy Framework issued by the AU in 2003 which outlined a roadmap to a full operational capability by 2010.¹⁴ The force was to be structured around five brigade sized formations, one each from

7. Reforming Peacekeeping, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/reforming-peacekeeping> (accessed 21 March 2018).

8. Report of the UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial in London 7-8 September 2016 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/566647/FCO1022_Defence_Ministerial_Meeting_on_UN_Peacekeeping_v9.pdf (accessed 21 March 2018).

9. Report of the 5th African Union High Level Retreat, October 2014, Silencing the Guns, Owning the Future, <http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/arusha-au-high-level-retreat-report-web.pdf> (accessed 21 March 2018).

10. AU Peace and Security Council, <https://au.int/en/organs/psc> (accessed 21

March 2018).

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. ISS Peace and Security Council Report: Denialism Plagues Africa's Early Warning System, 19 April 2017 <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/on-the-agenda/denialism-plagues-africas-early-warning-system> (accessed 21 March 2018).

14. ISS Policy Brief No 34 September 2012 – Operationalising the African Standby Force <https://oldsite.issafrica.org/uploads/PolBrief34.pdf> (accessed 21 March 2018).

the north, south, east, east west and central regions of the continent. Despite the AU declaring the ASF fully operational and ready for deployment in 2016 after a field training exercise held in South Africa in the previous year, overall the ASF remains an incomplete capability. Whilst the formations developed by ECOWAS and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are fully operational those in other regions are at varying levels of preparedness. Indeed, that for North Africa based on the North African Regional Capacity (NARC) organisation in the absence of a coherent REC is non-existent. Whilst the NARC did belatedly sign the 2008 Memorandum of Understanding between the AU and the ASF parent organisations in 2010. It would appear that subsequent events in Libya stalled any further development.¹⁵ Overall, whilst resources remain a challenge it is perhaps a lack of coherent political will or capacity in some of the regional organisations that is inhibiting the development of the ASF leading some commentators to suggest that whilst regional coordinating mechanisms are valuable, perhaps a refocus on national contributions and coalitions of the willing are a more effective way to deliver a meaningful African military intervention capability.¹⁶

The Opportunities and Challenges to a Regional Approach to Peace and Security in Africa

Perhaps the most obvious advantage of a regional focus to supporting the AUs efforts to build peace and security in Africa is their inherently better understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics and political nuances of their region. In addition they will often have a greater stake in ensuring that conflict situations are stabilised so as not to suffer the consequences of conflict spill over, refugee flows and disruption to trade links.¹⁷ Further this gives a greater legitimacy to intervention when compared to

those from outside. Thus, it can be argued that the RECs should be the focus for delivery by the AU.

The most recent example of how successful this approach can be was the intervention by ECOWAS in The Gambia in late 2016 and early 2017. Against a background of continuing political tension in the country, Adama Barrow won a presidential election against the incumbent Yahya Jammeh on 1 December 2016. Despite having initially appeared to accept the results, there was an increasing fear that Jammeh would attempt to disrupt the handover of power with the possibility of violent conflict. With leadership from key states in ECOWAS, the REC came together with the AU and the UN to ensure a constitutional change of government. Whilst initial efforts to persuade Jammeh to leave were diplomatic they were undertaken against a background of military preparations by ECOWAS so that when he missed a deadline on 19 January 2017, ECOWAS forces primarily from Senegal, Ghana and Nigeria entered Gambia. There was subsequently little fighting and Jammeh left for exile within a few days. Thus, through the use of regionally focused coercive diplomacy violent conflict was averted albeit the circumstances were particularly propitious.¹⁸

However, it must also be noted that those apparent strengths of regional understanding and adjacency whilst generally strengths can also be problematic. IGADs role in mediating peace in South Sudan has at times been undermined by the involvement of some of the adjacent member states in the conflict. Ugandan forces have directly supported GoSS on military operations with both land and air forces for example, and as noted previously, Kenya had a significant contingent in UNMISS. It should also be noted that Sudan which has been accused of supporting various factions in the current conflict is also a member of IGAD.¹⁹

In addition to the benefits and weaknesses of local links, the highly differentiated development of the various RECs and other regional organisations means relying on these as the primary vehicles for peace and security is unlikely to deliver consistent and coherent outcomes. Whilst to varying degrees ECOWAS, IGAD and SADC have demonstrated some capabilities, politics, capacity

15. North Africa Regional Capability signs the MoU between AU, Regional Economic Communities and Regional Standby Brigades of East and North Africa 2010, <https://europafrika.net/2010/06/01/north-africa-regional-capability-signs-the-mou-between-au-regional-economic-communities-and-regional-standby-brigades-of-east-and-north-africa/> (accessed 21 March 2018).

16. ISS Peace and Security Council Report: What is holding the African Standby Force Back?, <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/on-the-agenda/what-is-holding-the-african-standby-force-back> (accessed 21 March 2018).

17. ISS Paper 301, November 2016: Sustainable Peace – Driving the African Peace and Security Architecture through ECOWAS <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/paper301.pdf> (accessed 21 March 2018).

18. Williams P. D. (2017) A New African Model of Coercion? Assessing the ECOWAS Mission in the Gambia, IPI Observatory <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/03/ecowas-gambia-barrow-jammeh-african-union/> (accessed 21 March 2018).

19. Cosmas K. (2015) South Sudan Peace Talks: The role of IGAD – Peace Insight <https://www.peaceinsight.org/es/blog/2015/03/south-sudan-peace-talks-role-igad/?en=1> (accessed 21 Mar 2018).

and resource limitations conspire to limit any meaningful development in the centre or the north. Even in those RECs where there is some capacity and resource there remain challenges. Policies on the AUPSA are unclear as to the extent of complementarity and subsidiarity that should exist between AU capacities and those at the regional level. For example, where ECOWAS has a well-developed early warning capacity, should CEWS rather than reporting on West Africa rather focus on building capacity elsewhere or perhaps ensuring that those reports generated regionally are developed so as to inform the policy makers on the PSC? The temptation will be for the AU to develop standardised approaches across the RECs rather than recognising the importance of the differences in regional capacity. Further, where a REC has developed best practice models, the AU should be prepared to create platforms for these to be shared more broadly.

Conclusion: Back to the Nation State?

Despite the AU's aspiration to banish violent conflict from the continent by 2020, war continues to be a significant disruption to chances of wider economic and political development. The UN has led efforts by the international community to bring stability through its peacekeeping operations, but these continue to be challenged both by the difficulties of having no peace to keep as well as technical challenges associated with the need to deliver more robust capabilities.

The AUPSA provides a framework for the delivery of 'African solutions to African problems' and in some areas has demonstrated significant progress. However, its military component the ASF relies heavily on regional organisations and as such it remains highly differentiated in capability terms. Whilst ECOWAS has demonstrated some successes and continues to deepen and broaden its regional approach to peace and security in other cases, development can best be described as stagnant.

Perhaps an alternate approach might be to focus on the nation-state once more with the AUPSA being developed to bring together appropriately focused 'coalitions of the willing'. In this way, those states with the political and economic capacity, as well as the military capability where needed, could be engaged when situations are identified by the CEWS and authorised by the PSC.

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