The African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) should prioritize pragmatic realism over idealist ambition in mandating and enhancing the operational effectiveness of future peace support operations (PSOs). By pragmatism, the PSC should realistically and routinely match resources with objectives, and understand the limits of PSOs as tools for conflict management. Acting on behalf of the AU, the PSC has become an important regional actor in mandating PSOs, especially high-intensity offensive operations where the United Nations (UN) is unable or unwilling to deploy. The deployment and operation of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) since 2007 is the most vivid example of a PSC-mandated mission that has clearly transcended the boundaries of a conventional peacekeeping mission.

Various assessments of PSC-mandated missions have exposed critical challenges linked to funding gaps, difficulties in assembling and mobilizing peace intervention forces, issues relating to operational command and control, and the fact that the asymmetric nature of new security threats makes extended missions almost inevitable.

There is urgent imperative that the conduct of protracted peace enforcement operations be based on one of two models. First, that in which the AU takes the lead with a predefined and dedicated source of flexible and predictable resourcing based on shared responsibility on the part of its member states and the international community (for example, Operation Democracy in Comoros). Alternatively, the AU could authorize a mission—without necessarily leading it—with the goal of providing legitimacy for an effective regional coalition to address the security threat at hand. Examples of this latter arrangement include the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the elimination of the Lord’s Resistance Army (RCI-LRA) and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against the Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria and neighboring countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Peace and Security Council of the African Union should:

- Prioritize mandating small-to-medium-sized PSOs over larger and long-term missions;
- Undertake timely joint planning with the UN Secretariat to facilitate smooth transitions of AU PSOs to UN peacekeeping missions;
- Authorize and coordinate counterterrorism operations, but allow regional coalitions or a lead state to take charge.


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To improve the efficacy of the first model—the AU-led PSOs—the PSC should focus on mandating small- to medium-sized PSOs, typically not exceeding 10,000 personnel and thirty-six months. The records of past and current PSOs suggest that the AU is more effective in managing this type and size of mission. Such missions have specific mandates, well-defined command and control responsibilities, and often include a pre-defined exit strategy involving a transfer of responsibility from AU PSOs to UN peacekeeping missions following initial stabilization efforts. Examples of such missions include the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) and the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic (MISCA).

Moreover, the AU is better able to undertake short missions where the host government already maintains some semblance of basic national security institutions. The absence of such basic security infrastructure challenges operations in ways that make any planned and systematic exit strategy difficult, as witnessed by AMISOM in Somalia. Presently, the AU is facing uncharted territory, where AMISOM troops must work side-by-side with the poorly trained and resourced Somali National Armed Forces and an international community understandably showing signs of support fatigue. This conclusion is, by no means, an attempt to berate the importance and relevance of the AU in contexts like Somalia, but rather to emphasize that effective and coordinated support for rebuilding national security institutions is a critical first step to accelerating the AU’s exit strategy.2

Finally, the question of resourcing PSOs must be addressed, as the AU PSOs of the past decade have been almost exclusively funded by partner states and organizations. There are now compelling reasons for the AU to “right size” missions on the basis of financial commitments by member states. In this spirit, the June 2016 AU Heads of State and Government Summit in Kigali, Rwanda decided to implement a 0.2 percent levy on imported goods from outside the continent to finance 100% of the operating budget, 75% of the program budget, and 25% of the peace and security budget of the African Union, starting from 2017.3 The summit also decided that the AU Peace Fund should be endowed from the 0.2 percent levy with an amount of USD 325 million in 2017, rising to USD 400 million in 2020. This watershed decision resulted from earlier recommendations by the high-level panel on Alternative Sources of Financing the African Union led by former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, and the subsequent appointment of Donald Kaberuka, former President of the Africa Development Bank, as the AU High Representative of the Peace Fund. Once fully implemented, this decision will allow AU member states to exercise greater autonomy over PSOs.

Despite the positive note, it is important to acknowledge that adequate financing is necessary but not sufficient to successfully implement the new generation of PSOs. Improved AU financing of PSOs is unlikely to fully support the massive costs of deploying large and complex offensive operations like AMISOM. Excluding AMISOM, the average estimated annual budget of existing African PSOs does not exceed USD 200 million; thus, financial contributions under the Peace Fund could accommodate smaller and less protracted PSOs with minimal external support. In contrast, AMISOM’s current annual budget alone is estimated at USD 900 million, making it difficult to rely primarily on the Peace Fund for such large counterinsurgency operations.

In other words, the AU will be unable to realistically fund and, by extension, control the operation of missions similar to AMISOM for the foreseeable future. By pursuing small-to-medium scale and limited duration operations for PSOs in which it is the lead actor, the AU is likely to find itself in a stronger position regarding the ownership and effective management of future peace support operations. Consequently, the closer a PSO’s mandate gravitates towards fighting asymmetrical warfare, the stronger and more compelling the case for a regional coalition or lead state to take charge, rather than the exercise of full command and control by the African Union.

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Peace and Security Council of the African Union should:

- Place a primacy on mandating small-to-medium-sized PSOs, which could be financially accommodated through the proposed funding arrangement of the Peace Fund;
- Undertake timely joint planning between the AU Commission and the UN Secretariat in order to facilitate the possibility of a smooth transition from the early deployment of an AU PSO to a UN peacekeeping mission, if required; and,
- Be responsible for authorizing and coordinating counterterrorism operations, with their deployment primarily led by regional coalitions or a lead state.

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