



# IPSS

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# Policy Brief

## **Peace Support Operations in Africa: Optimising Triangular Partnerships between the African Union, Sub-regional Organisations, and the United Nations**

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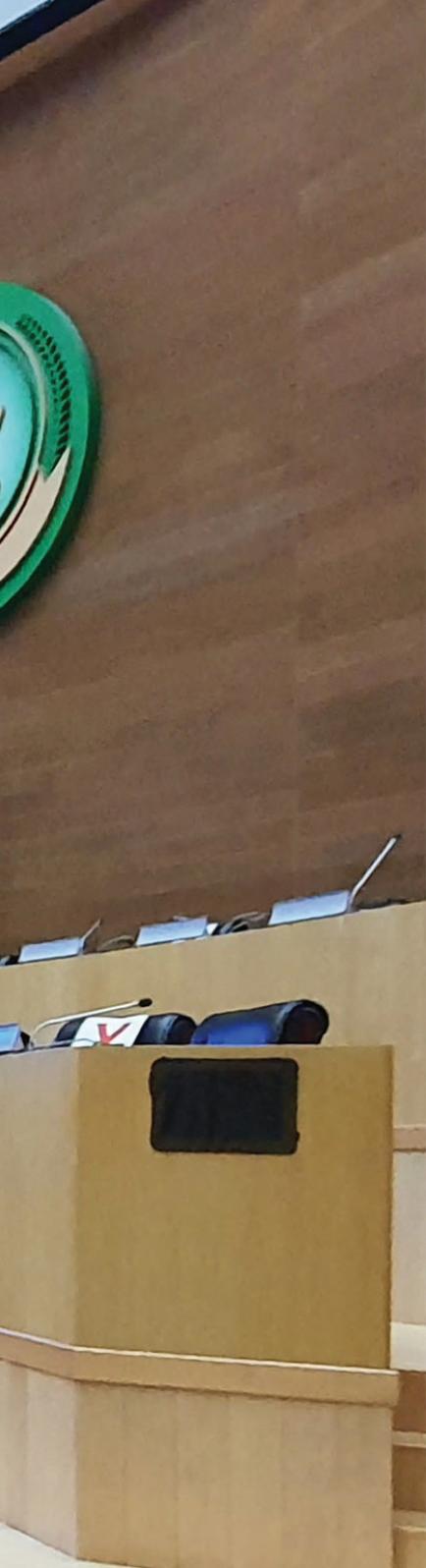


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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





The African Union (AU) and African Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) have recently emerged as indispensable partners to the United Nations (UN) in the area of international peace and security.<sup>1</sup> The AU and RECs/RMs are increasingly assuming more responsibility and leadership over the maintenance of peace and Security in the African Continent through the gradual development of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). This is particularly evident through the deployment of African-led peace support operations (PSOs) in highly complex contexts where there is often “no peace to keep”.<sup>2</sup> While there is momentum towards nurturing a pragmatic division of labour between the AU, the RECs/RMs, and the UN, driven primarily by both material and normative pressures, recent outcomes have exposed the limitations and obstacles standing in the way of their partnership.<sup>3</sup>

In the particular context of African-led PSOs, achieving more cohesive, effective, and sustainable triangular partnerships between the AU, RECs/RMs, and the UN remains a crucial necessity recognised by all three actors. However, the prospects of more effective and complementary tripartite interventions are currently hindered by a variety of political, operational/bureaucratic, and financial challenges. As discussions concerning a potential AU takeover of increasingly contentious UN PSOs in countries like Mali and the DRC continue to grow, the importance of strengthening the partnership between the AU, the RECs/RMs, and the UN has become more urgent than ever.<sup>4</sup> Fully harnessing the combined advantage of all three major actors within these partnerships ultimately requires a degree of mutual compromise from all respective sides.

## KEY POINTS

- Optimising triangular partnerships and ensuring a coherent division of labour between the AU, RECs/RMs, and the UN remains imperative to achieving more effective PSOs on the African continent.
- The AU, RECs/RMs, and the UN should seek to clarify the principle of subsidiarity that ought to regulate their relationship and interventions; they should also seek to harmonise their bureaucratic and operational procedures and capacities; and they should urgently come to an agreement on the use of UN assessed contributions, to ensure the predictable and sustainable financing of African-led PSOs.
- All three actors within the strategic triangular partnerships must remain open to make political, operational/bureaucratic, and financial concessions in order to reach more optimal outcomes for the benefit of all of their respective stakeholders.



# INTRODUCTION

Since 2002, the gradual development and operationalisation of the African Peace and Security Architecture has seen the AU and the RECs/RMs emerge as indispensable partners to the UN, particularly in the realm of Peace Support Operations in Africa.<sup>5</sup> Broadly speaking, APSA refers to a constellation of interrelated institutions and actors who are working in tandem towards the prevention, management, and long-term resolution of conflicts occurring in the African continent.<sup>6</sup> The operationalisation of various APSA institutions in recent years — such as the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), the Continental Early Warning System, the African Standby Force, and the African Peace Fund — has enabled the AU to emerge as a dynamic and impactful actor within the complex environments in which peace operations increasingly take place.<sup>7</sup> That said, while the AU has made significant progress in the deployment of robust African-led PSOs, recent experiences such as the peace operations mandated by the AU in Burundi (2003-2004), Sudan (2004-2007), Somalia (2007 to date) and Mali (2013), have also proved the crucial importance of nurturing stronger partnerships with both the UN and many African RECs/RMs — who are pivotal actors influencing peace and security outcomes in the continent.<sup>8</sup>

As the nature of peace and security challenges that the continent faces becomes increasingly unconventional and regional in scope, “African-led solutions” have been promoted by African actors as a strategic necessity to respond to such issues in a context-specific and sustainable way.<sup>9</sup> Yet, the AU and the various RECs/RMs are all also acutely aware of their respective limitations, which ultimately necessitates fostering a more effective triangular partnership and division of labour between themselves and the UN. This tripartite partnership entails that all three major actors leverage their complementary and comparative advantages to achieve more optimal outcomes in the area of peace and security in Africa.

Success stories of such triangular partnerships have been achieved, as seen for instance during the following: the recent Central African Republic peace talks; the Revitalised-Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS); at various stages of the AU–UN Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID); and the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), where the AU worked in tandem with the relevant RECs and the UN to achieve common mandates more efficient and sustainable, by leveraging the comparative advantages of each respective institution.<sup>10</sup>

That being said, significant political, operational/bureaucratic, and financial challenges and points of contention continue to stand in the way of fully harnessing the combined

effect of these individual actors, particularly in the context of African-led PSOs. With recent UN Security Council debate about replacing the increasingly shunned UN PSOs in Mali and the DRC with AU forces equipped with more robust mandates, it is now particularly crucial to identify and resolve the significant challenges that may hinder the effectiveness of African-led PSOs.<sup>11</sup> This policy brief unpacks some of the key roadblocks hindering more effective triangular partnerships in the context of African-led PSOs and provides actionable recommendations to chart a more coherent and impactful way forward.

## POLITICAL CHALLENGES

Effective interorganisational cooperation in the case of PSOs in Africa has for a long time been hampered by political discord between the three core actors involved, namely the AU, the RECS/RM, and the UN. A first major point of friction pertains to the fuzzy notion of subsidiarity, a political principle which emphasises the need for actors who are either culturally, geopolitically and/or strategically closest to a crisis situation to take leadership over conflict intervention.<sup>12</sup> In the context of the triangular partnership in African-led PSOs, the notion of subsidiarity is further complicated by the fact that it involves various layers: the relationship and hierarchy between the AU and the RECs on one hand, and the relationship between the AU, RECs/RMs and the UN, on the other hand.

The AU-UN relationship is governed by Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, which grants legal permission for regional organisations to intervene in matters of international peace and security — provided that they first obtain authorisation from the UN Security Council (UNSC).<sup>13</sup> While both organisations formally recognise that the UNSC bears the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace

and security, debates over political primacy, division of labour, and financial burden-sharing continue to divide the central decision-making organs of both organisations, namely the UNSC and the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), when it comes to peace and security.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, the AU PSC continues to promote the idea of African ownership and leadership over PSOs in Africa by emphasising its comparative advantage in terms of doctrinal flexibility (i.e. freedom to conduct robust peace enforcement), proximity to conflict theatres, political legitimacy to intervene in its “neighbourhood”, and its ability to deploy large troops in complex settings.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the UNSC, particularly its five Permanent Members (P5), are reluctant to the idea of relinquishing political authority over peace and security outcomes in Africa, to only end up merely serving as financiers of regional interventions that they do not ultimately control. While the 2017 Joint African Union–United Nations Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security aims to resolve some of these long-standing debates, much work on the political level is needed to foster a more complementary and cohesive

partnership between both organisations, especially in situations where the PSC and the P5 have conflicting interests, as witnessed in Libya 2011 and Mali 2012.<sup>16</sup>

Despite their uneven strengths and fragmented character, both the AU and the UN recognise the crucial importance of involving the relevant RECs/RMs in PSOs deployed in any given sub-region of the continent.<sup>17</sup> However, in spite of a 2008 Protocol and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cooperation in the Area of Peace and Security, aimed at clarifying the principle of subsidiarity and enhancing the coordination between the AU and the RECs/RMs, the relationship between the two is still described as problematic and contentious in various scenarios.<sup>18</sup> Adding to this issue is the fact that Chapter VIII of the UN charter does not distinguish between regional and sub-regional organisations, thereby leaving room for ambiguity and internal political disagreements between the RECs and the AU over which institution should be granted permission by the UNSC to intervene in a given conflict.<sup>19</sup> This was made clear, for instance, during the 2010-2011 crisis in Côte d'Ivoire and the 2012 crisis in Mali, when the AU and the Economic Community of West African States failed to agree on a common course of action due to disagreements over intervention leadership.<sup>20</sup> As such, achieving political coherence in the triangular partnership is first and foremost contingent on clarifying the principle of subsidiarity —not only between the UN and the AU, but also between the AU and the RECs/RMs.

Beyond the issue of subsidiarity and struggles over political pre-eminence within triangular partnerships, there is also the lingering issue of Africa's place and voice in the UNSC — the supreme authority on international peace and security. African peace and security issues have recently occupied more than 50% of the UNSC's agenda and most UN PSOs are deployed in Africa with African troops, despite this, Africa still does not have a permanent seat at the UNSC. The three African non-permanent members (A3) have struggled in vain to alter the working methods of the UNSC (e.g. the "penholder system") in order to gain more influence on African issues.<sup>21</sup> This political issue remains a source of frustration as it constrains the margin of manoeuvre of African actors who find their efforts to intervene in a given crisis blocked by veto-wielding powers of the UNSC, who often act out of their own narrow national self-interests.<sup>22</sup> This issue has generated a lot of clashes between the AU PSC and the UNSC, notably in cases like Libya 2011 and following the 2013 UNSC decision to deploy the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), when the AU PSC's voice was sidelined in favour of advancing the parochial interests of some P5 members.<sup>23</sup>

# OPERATIONAL AND BUREAUCRATIC CHALLENGES

The political challenges of the triangular partnership are also compounded by several operational and bureaucratic obstacles which have yet to be resolved. These include: communication, coordination, procedural and technical capacity issues. While the 2017 Joint UN-AU Framework for Enhancing Partnership on Peace and Security has improved the strategic and operational coordination between both organisations, much remains to be done to facilitate more coherent triangular partnerships in the particular area of PSOs.<sup>24</sup>

At a strategic communication and coordination level, the current joint UN-AU bi-annual meetings are often viewed as insufficient to coordinate strategies and follow-up on operations. Additionally, while partnerships between the UN Secretariat and AU Commission have grown notably since the opening of the UN Office to the African Union (UNOAU) in 2010, there is also a need for the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operation (DPKO) to work more closely with the Peace Support Operations Division at the AU and within the relevant RECs.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, divergent bureaucratic procedures and organisational cultures also make it difficult for the UNSC and AU PSC to coordinate agendas, and for the UNSC to consider the position of the AU PSC or the relevant RECs/RMs prior to making its binding decisions.<sup>26</sup> This was evidenced during the Libyan crisis of 2011, where the UNSC failed to coordinate with the AU PSC prior to their decision to intervene.

In addition, strengthening triangular partnerships is also contingent on resolving the perennial issue of uneven and weak administrative and logistical capacity at the level of the AU and the various RECs/RM. Undeniably, while the UN Secretariat and DPKO is very well resourced and has decades of experience in deploying large PSOs, African leadership of PSOs is severely limited by constraints in administrative and technical capacity, and by relative inexperience in the field. Overcoming these crucial operational and bureaucratic challenges at all levels of the triangular partnership is thus crucial and more urgent than ever.

# FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

Closely interrelated with the first two sets of challenges — and arguably the most pressing and perennial challenge to triangular partnerships — is the issue of sustainable and predictable financing of African-led PSOs.<sup>27</sup> Many years of heated negotiations and attempts to resolve this issue have failed to produce concrete outcomes, and have even led to a worsening of relations between African and extra regional actors.<sup>28</sup> However, recent decades of experiences — notably in the context of major African-led PSOs such as; AMISOM, UNAMID, and AFISMA — have made it clear that dragging the problem of financial burden sharing for much longer can lead to suboptimal outcomes, which can put the lives of troops at great risk.<sup>29</sup>

In 2015, AU member states produced a Common African Position on the Financing of AU led Peace Support Operations through UN Assessed Contributions. This position reiterated the AU's stance that African-led PSOs authorised by the UNSC represent a local response conducted on behalf of the international community.<sup>30</sup> As such, the AU firmly contends that the UNSC has a duty to provide UN assessed contributions to African-led PSOs in a flexible, predictable and sustainable manner.<sup>31</sup> The AU has also committed itself to self-finance 25% of peace and security activities by instituting a 0.2% levy on eligible imports to Africa, and by reviving the long dormant African Peace Fund.<sup>32</sup> While the idea of co-financing African PSOs through UN assessed contributions has been recommended

by the Prodi panel in 2008, and by the UN High Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (HIPPO) in 2015, various draft resolutions on this issue have failed to pass at the UNSC.<sup>33</sup> P5 members such as the US and the UK have, for instance, opposed a 2018 draft proposal submitted by the A3, citing concerns about the AU's ability to cover 25% of the costs, and its ability to comply with the UN's human rights and financial accountability standards.<sup>34</sup>

Beyond the UN, the European Union (EU) has been the long-standing financier of African-led PSOs such as AMISOM, with over 2.9 billion Euros channelled to the AU between 2007 and 2020 through the African Peace Facility.<sup>35</sup> However, recent changes in the EU's financial aid disbursement strategy — from an AU-specific fund to a global fund (European Peace Facility Fund) — risks exacerbating competition for funding between the AU and the RECs/RMs.<sup>36</sup>

To avoid “donor fatigue”, reduce dependency on external partners, and to ensure a more sustainable path forward, the AU has been turning towards self-financing and co-financing alternatives.<sup>37</sup> Implementing the 0.2% imports levy on imports would therefore enable the AU to truly be in a position to lead and coordinate successful PSOs with a greater degree of autonomy, flexibility, and decision-making capacity.

# CONCLUSION

In conclusion, stronger and more coherent triangular partnerships between the AU, the UN, and the RECs remains imperative in order to address the plethora of peace and security challenges that the African continent faces. That said, harnessing the great potential of such triangular partnerships between the AU, the UN, and the RECs/RMs in the context of African-led PSOs is contingent upon overcoming significant political, bureaucratic, and financial barriers. The forthcoming set of actionable recommendations will help chart a more cohesive and efficient path forward.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## OVERCOMING POLITICAL CHALLENGES

- The UNSC, the AU PSC, and the relevant RECs/RMs should agree, through the implementation of a tripartite MOU, on a standard interpretation of Chapter VIII of the UN. This will ideally clarify the principle of subsidiarity and resolve questions of political leadership over PSOs in Africa.
- The AU and the RECS/RMs should foster more complementary political structures through the full implementation of existing MOUs, to ensure that any agreement between the AU and the UN inherently implies alignment with the RECs/RMs within the triangular partnership.
- African voices ought to be reinforced at the UNSC or at the very least through reforms of the working methods of the council, - which would see the A3 members become “penholders” (i.e. members of the Council that lead the negotiation and drafting of resolutions on a

particular Council agenda item) over African issues. This will ideally help improve the political coordination between the UNSC and the AU and RECS/RMs.

## OVERCOMING OPERATIONAL/ BUREAUCRATIC CHALLENGES

- At a strategic level, increasing the frequency of high-level consultations, as well as coordinating the agendas and procedures of relevant bureaucratic authorities at the AU, UN and RECs/RMs is imperative to foster more cohesive triangular partnerships.
- The human resource capacity of liaison offices should be reinforced at every level. More experienced partners, such as the UN DPKO, should consider seconding more of their staff members, and appointing more special representatives to the AU and the RECs/RMs to help reinforce their capacities and facilitate timely information sharing.

- International partners should be open to providing more flexible and generous technology transfer packages and logistical/operational capacity-building support to African regional institutions and host-state security forces. This will help ensure that the African-led PSOs achieve their mandate in a timely, effective, and cost-efficient manner.

## OVERCOMING FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

- The AU and RECS/RMs should urgently re-engage the UNSC on the issue of predictable and sustainable financing of African-led PSOs through UN assessed contributions. They should be ready to prove that they have met all prerequisites — including guaranteeing the 25% African financial contribution, as well as demonstrating evidence of robust human rights and financial governance compliance frameworks.
- To move past the current deadlocks, UNSC members should be ready to make some flexible compromise on financial burden sharing and should avoid shifting the goalposts on the prerequisites that must be met prior to agreeing on a more predictable and financially sustainable path forward for African-led PSOs.
- The AU and RECs/RMs should keep exploring ways to increase the self-financing of African-led PSOs. This could be by fully implementing the 0.2% import levy. It could also be by either incentivising or sanctioning member states who default on their contributions to the AU Peace Fund.

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