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Forces for Peace

*Realities of peace support
operations in Africa*

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Introduction

Evan Nachtrieb

This report comes amidst a moment of transition for peace support operations (PSOs) in Africa. The UN has not deployed a new mission since 2014, and traditional European and American sources of support for African PSOs are no longer forthcoming. Despite these challenging circumstances, the need for these mission remains. Each contributor to this report confronts a different dimension of this same challenge: how can peace be secured when PSOs are increasingly under-resourced, outside support is uncertain, and conflict continues to spread?

Structural challenges

Overshadowing all other discussions is the centrality of funding. Accordingly, this report leads with an analysis of the most recent attempt to remedy this Achilles heel of African PSOs. In this first chapter Ueli Staeger introduces the promise and perils of UNSCR 2719, a resolution allowing UN peacekeeping funds to be allocated to African-led PSOs. Despite the optimism that the resolution generated when passed in 2023, implementation remains elusive. Complicating matters further, is that while the resolution was aimed at funding AU missions, it is the sub-regional Regional Economic Communities and bilateral deployments that dominate PSO on the continent today.

Yet funding is not the only thing that the UN can, or should provide. In the following chapter, Dimpho Delelise argues that the transfer of UN funding must come alongside institutions, standards, and operational procedures that hold missions accountable. In addition to the immediate suffering of the victims, harm to civilians by a mission through abuse or collateral damage threatens the mission's legitimacy. Without protecting the most vulnerable from the missions themselves, the cause of peace is undermined.

Even as the traditional model recedes, new middle powers are increasingly involved in the African PSO landscape. An interview with Edmund Yakani delves into this growing strategic role of non-traditional actors in African PSOs, rounding off the structural level discussion.

Making missions more effective

While much of the discussion on PSOs focuses on these international structural issues, it is ultimately dynamics on the ground that determine the success or failure of a mission. In all missions, good relations with the host government are at the core. The failure of MINUSMA in Mali, as described by Abdoul Sogodogo, provides a warning of what happens to missions spurned by their host's public.

If a PSO is deployed with an offensive mandate, it must be prepared to fight and win on the battlefield. This is easier said than done, especially in an environment of constrained resources. In their chapters on the SADC intervention in the DRC, Stephanie Wolters and Fred Bauma describe the consequences of an underequipped mission and an uncoordinated Congolese alliance being defeated outright by a superior enemy. Eгна Siduma describes the complexities of "local" legitimacy in the counter-insurgency missions in Mozambique – here too combat performance was an aid in obtaining the intangible prerequisites for mission success.

Exit strategies

However, combat performance is also not enough. Samira Gaid's analysis of the AU mission in Somalia makes the convincing case that the short-term focus on fighting must be balanced with the core political and economic task of building a viable Somali state. Preemptive withdrawal, without a transition to capable Somali authorities, risks squandering eighteen years of work and donor resources.

The last two chapters of the report expand on the critical importance of exit strategies. Sait Matty Jaw's shows how a lack of exit strategy led ECOWAS's quick and initially successful intervention in The Gambia to unintentionally evolve into a semi-permanent feature of the country's security infrastructure. Hubert Kinkoh rounds

out this collection with a wide overview of seven different PSOs and their success – or failure – in developing an exit strategy.

Lessons learned hard

Together, these nine chapters illuminate the key challenges facing African PSOs: obtaining outside support,

achieving operation effectiveness, and planning for their departure. The era of large budgets and open-ended mandates is over. Missions will need to be more limited and more efficient to secure the peace.

Africa has no shortage of experience in peace operations. These nine chapters tap into this rich hard-won experience to shine a light upon the challenges ahead.

UN Funding for African-led Peace Operations: The Genesis, Impasse, and Future of Resolution 2719

Ueli Staeger

For well over a decade, the African Union (AU) has been in pursuit of “predictable, adequate, and sustainable financing”, including through the United Nations (UN), for its peace support operations (PSOs). UN Security Council Resolution 2719, passed on 21 December 2023, seemed a breakthrough. It provides a framework for accessing UN assessed contributions, and includes detailed joint UN-AU planning and administrative provisions as well as human rights oversight. But implementation has proven problematic. Resolution 2719 was notably not used for the AU Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) launched in January 2025. At a time of rapidly changing patterns of multilateralism, security, and African visions of statehood, the resolution will only succeed if it is a nimble and living framework.

The genesis of Resolution 2719

Since the early 2000s, the AU has mounted almost two dozen peace operations, from small observer missions to combat-ready interventions. But these efforts have exposed a fundamental challenge over funding. Mission costs have been largely borne by non-African partners, undermining the AU’s political ambition of an independent, collective security role, and the principle of predictable financing. Ad hoc external financial support has become institutionalised in the form of the European Union’s African Peace Facility (APF), which disbursed more than €3 billion between 2004 and 2020 (European Commission 2021). The EU’s involvement in the design, operation, and drawdown of African-led PSOs sits uncomfortably at odds with the AU’s pan-African vision.

Calls for alternative funding models are far from new. The 2008 Prodi Panel report (United Nations 2008) explored sustainable and flexible financing for AU-led PSOs, followed by the seminal High-level Independent

Panel on UN Peace Operations (HIPPO) (United Nations 2015b). A joint UN-AU review (United Nations 2016) and a UN Secretary-General report (United Nations 2017) also presented options for using UN assessed contributions for AU missions. Yet diplomatic uptake of these ideas was slow. A push in 2018, spearheaded by the three African non-permanent members of the Security Council (known as A3) came close to passing a similar framework to Resolution 2719. It reached the final stage of ‘blue text’ but was halted by the threat of a US veto and hesitation from other P5 members, alongside divisions within the AU itself.

Persistent African diplomacy on the Security Council, and a lucky window of geopolitical opportunity, led to the adoption of Resolution 2719. It owed a debt in part to US President Joe Biden’s deliberate pursuit of multilateral re-engagement in contrast to his predecessor, Donald Trump. More fundamentally, the resolution was also seen as an answer to UN peacekeeping fatigue from Security Council members, underlined by the failure to authorise any new UN multidimensional missions since 2014, and to properly resource existing interventions. There was growing agreement that African-led PSOs could help fill that gap, as well as overcome the crisis of legitimacy bedevilling blue helmet deployments in a number of African countries. Ghana made the issue a priority during its 2022-2023 term on the A3, and shepherded the draft resolution to conclusion in close collaboration with Gabon and Mozambique.

African diplomacy was persistent but far from perfectly coherent. There was friction between the A3 and AU headquarters in Addis Ababa over the fraught issue of PSO burden sharing. Member states on the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) insisted on 100% funding from UN assessed contributions, whereas the A3 backed a compromise arrangement – eventually agreed to by the United States – for a 75% ceiling on the UN’s contribution. That leaves the AU to finance 25% of operational costs sourced either internally, or as a mix of AU funds

and external partner support. By avoiding a hard ask on the AU's limited resources, the resolution sidestepped a major sticking point for AU member states. In addition, the Security Council agreed to consider "all viable options" if a significant shortfall emerged over the 25% share (UN Security Council 2023: para. 6), a flexibility seen as important in preventing missions from failing at the first hurdle.

Design and challenges of Resolution 2719

Resolution 2719 provides a blueprint for an enhanced UN-AU partnership for peace support in Africa. Building on well-established notions of comparative advantage and 'partnership peacekeeping' (Williams and Boutellis 2014), the resolution authorises UN assessed funding on a case-by-case basis. But the resolution is not a blank cheque. UN contributions will require a separate Security Council decision each time they are requested, maintaining its political oversight and gatekeeping role (Crisis Group 2024). The intended main beneficiary is the AU, although the continent's Regional Economic Communities (RECs) could also be funded via the AU – an issue that has lacked extensive diplomatic discussion.

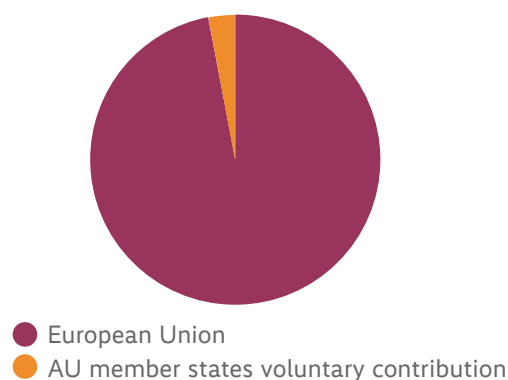
Resolution 2719 stops short of creating a standing financial mechanism like the EU's APF with quasi-automatic approval of allocations. Control of UN assessed contributions remains with UN member states – especially major financial contributors – through the UN's budgeting and appropriation processes. The inequity between who pays and who implements – which has long frustrated the AU over its dependence on the EU – is not fully eliminated. Instead, there is potential for broader geopolitical competition among the P5 over funding for AU PSOs under Resolution 2719. While EU funding implied managing one geopolitical bloc's interests, the Security Council's permanent members could bring the full complexity of global geopolitical competition into the AU's politics of funding. Particularly with the P5 increasingly involved individually in African security crises. Time will tell whether the AU's push for autonomy and financial innovation actually benefits from this new modality.

In addition to case-by-case political oversight, the resolution attaches stringent compliance conditions to any AU mission receiving UN funds. These include adherence to the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) – ensuring that UN funds do not support units that commit human rights abuses – and the implementation of both Protection of Civilians (POC) strategies and guidelines on gender responsiveness in operations.

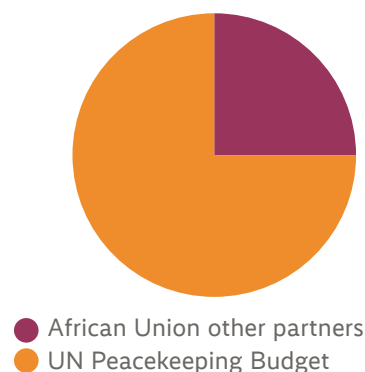
The AU also has to comply with UN financial regulations and reporting requirements, including mission reports to the Security Council every 180 days, annual joint AU-UN reporting, and a review of each financing decision every three years (Amani Africa, 2024a). In practice, a tight 'secretariat-to-secretariat' process is envisioned where the UN Secretariat and AU Commission work closely together from the early stages of any potential mission: from threat assessment and concept of operations to mandate design and budgeting. Nevertheless, the AU will retain "effective and direct command and control" of its mission (UN Security Council, 2023) – a key point for the Commission and PSC.

FIGURE 1
Share of financial burden in a traditional AU PSO and as intended in Resolution 2719

AU PSOs traditional budget structure (in %)



AU PSOs with Resolution 2719 budget (in %)



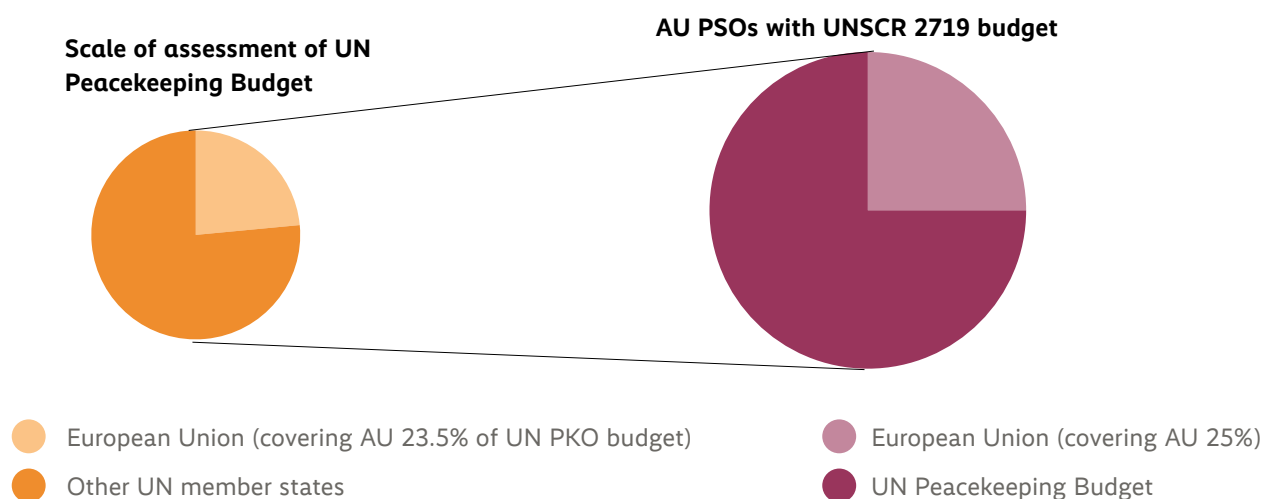
In practice, the EU could likely remain a significant funder of AU PSOs, at least in the medium term. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has refocused EU strategic priorities, but it still publicly supported Resolution 2719 – both in principle, and as an enhancement to global burden sharing (European Union, 2024). However, the EU's embrace of ad hoc security arrangements (for example, Rwanda's bilateral deployment in Mozambique), and widespread use of the European Peace Facility

(EPF) to support African armed forces, demonstrates that the EU views Resolution 2719 as just one of many mechanisms for upholding African security. Yet the EU's provision of funding for the AU's 25% share is anything but automatic. The EU-AU Ministerial Meeting in Brussels in May 2025 covered extensive ground in attempting to rekindle the EU-Africa partnership in today's new global geopolitical context, but there was no EU commitment beyond existing, boilerplate language (European Union, 2025).

Resolution 2719 could, however, represent a cost saving for the EU on future Chapter VII deployments. The EU funds almost 24% of the UN's regular peacekeeping budget, and could additionally be asked to cover part or

all of the AU's 25% mission share. The EU's total potential financial contribution to a UN-authorized and AU-led PSO could therefore reach almost 43% of the deployment's overall costs. Compared to the EU bankrolling an entire AU mission – as it has historically done with interventions in Somalia and elsewhere on the continent – that constitutes a substantial saving. In addition to more cumbersome financial management through two separate channels – directly from the EU to the AU, and from EU member states via the UN peacekeeping budget – the EU also faces political disadvantages to a prominent EU role in Resolution 2719 funding. As a result of burden sharing, the EU will find its strategic voice in African security diluted under a Resolution 2719 scenario.

FIGURE 2
The EU's share of AU PSOs under Resolution 2719



The AU's own efforts at diversified resource mobilisation through its \$400 million Peace Fund have picked up in recent years, but still fall short of the financial volumes and political will required to play a significant role in implementing Resolution 2719. AU member states also lack consensus on the Fund's replenishment after use. As a result, the Fund has actively engaged non-traditional AU partners and the African private and financial sectors to mobilise liquid funding accessible for disbursements. The Fund did manage to approve disbursements of \$6.5 million in 2023 and \$12 million in 2024 to its Crisis Reserve Facility to cover urgent security challenges, for example in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia, and Ethiopia. But, by comparison, that is well short of AUSSOM's 2025-26 budget of \$166.5 million (Amani Africa 2024b). More long-term efforts to generate contributions from AU member states include an agreed 0.2% import duty on non-African imports. Yet with less than 30% of AU members collecting the levy, it has done little to change the AU's funding landscape.

Born after its time: Resolution 2719's impasse

The optimism that underlined the adoption of Resolution 2719 has given way to a darker geopolitical reality. As a result, the resolution is yet to be activated. Although there was near unanimous support on the Security Council for the re-hatting of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) this year as AUSSOM, the Trump administration threatened to veto the use of Resolution 2719. The US Congress has also flagged its opposition to funding AUSSOM on the grounds that US taxpayers will be forced to pick up much of the bill (Amani Africa 2025; Sen. Risch 2025). Other potential applications for the resolution – such as in the Sahel or eastern DRC – have also run into opposition over their political and security appropriateness. Additionally, the bureaucratic procedures of AU-UN implementation are still being thrashed out. Although there has been progress with a joint task team and draft roadmap covering

planning, logistics, financing, and compliance, significant unresolved issues persist over triggers for planning; sequencing between AU and UN decision-making; and the degree of concrete Security Council oversight.

Resolution 2719 is, in many ways, born after its time. This fundamental challenge underlies the political and administrative problems of the framework resolution. Gone is the political demand for large-scale peacekeeping – by the UN and African regional organisations alike. Gone also is the belief that security challenges can meaningfully be addressed by deploying tens of thousands of soldiers in multidimensional missions. And, most crucially, gone is the willingness to enthusiastically fund such interventions. The AU's patient persistence on a framework resolution arguably did not take into account how fast the UN was changing. The UN's peacekeeping budget has dropped by more than 30% from about \$8.3 billion in 2015/16 to \$5.4 billion in 2025/26 (United Nations 2015a; 2025). This cut reflects deliberate budget tightening by major donors due to domestic fiscal and political constraints. In Washington, calls to cut the 26.5% US contribution to the UN peacekeeping budget (which was consistently not paid in full) have gained traction as part of broader cuts to the State Department (Landay et al. 2025). Meanwhile, China – the second largest funder of UN peacekeeping – is fiscally hawkish when it comes to Security Council action.

The AU will have to cope with a UN needing to 'do less with less' (Russo 2025). For the time being, finding political support for a wager on the success of a Resolution 2719 intervention will be challenging – despite African PSOs recognised comparative advantage when it comes to cost-effectiveness (United Nations, 2023). Experts are dubious about the UN's ability to raise money, mandates, and majorities for any peacekeeping endeavour in the current climate of financial hardship (Patz 2025). Together, these dynamics suggest that Resolution 2719 risks remaining more a symbol of past ambitions for collective security than a viable instrument for future UN-AU cooperation.

Charting a possible future for Resolution 2719

For African security to be able to take advantage of the opportunities Resolution 2719 still has to offer, a re-reading of the AU's core interests of predictable, adequate, and sustainable funding is useful. Rather than a static blueprint, the resolution should be seen as a living instrument whose roll-out must be calibrated to the financial, institutional, and political trends shaping UN-AU relations. Importantly, Resolution 2719 cannot (and will

not) be the only instrument in the UN-Africa security toolbox (Chen, 2025). Yet within its specific remit, the resolution still offers a vehicle to renegotiate the norms and cohesion of an increasingly elusive 'international community' (Tilahun, 2026).

Predictability is perhaps the biggest concern for an AU wishing to move beyond the constant organisational improvisation for security funding of its first 25 years. Doing so is first of all an administrative challenge. Many practical details remain unresolved (Tadesse 2025). For example, how exactly will UN funds be channelled to the AU? Who resolves disputes if the UN and AU assessments of an evolving deployment context vary? Are RECs – as deployed in the DRC and Mozambique – desirable conduits for UN funding, and if so, how much confidence-building between the AU and UN is necessary before adding a third party? The UN's peacekeeping methods prioritise process and accountability, while the AU's approach has been marked by flexibility and political opportunity-seeking. These cultures risk clashing. UN officials may view AU processes as lax and impose extra controls, while AU counterparts may see UN procedures as ponderous and overly bureaucratic.

Implementing Resolution 2719 requires interweaving the UN's and AU's bureaucratic logics – both complex in their own right. The AU's arrangements are comparatively simpler but still involve its PSC, Commission, funding partner liaison, and new oversight boards for the Peace Fund. The Commission's capacity to plan, deploy, and oversee complex operations is also more limited. Additionally, there potentially could be hesitancy over routing large sums of money through the AU's financial systems. Aligning bureaucratic structures is inherently slow and complicated, but crucial for better predictability at the administrative level.

Predictability is also deeply political. This touches upon turf wars around UN legitimacy and mandate competition in international security (MacFarlane 2023). Some at the UN fear that outsourcing too much to the AU could erode UN authority, while within the AU there is concern that taking UN money will mean de facto UN control and a loss of its cherished political autonomy. These undercurrents mean that despite official rhetoric of 'partnership', both sides may drag their feet in fully embracing the new approach, tending instead toward the familiar if suboptimal status quo. More optimistically, Resolution 2719 could embed UN-AU collaboration within the Security Council's institutional memory, driving shared language and mindsets over mandates when the AU lodges future requests.

Finally, the resolutions political predictability also depends on anticipating how the demand by African states for AU peace support may evolve over time. Capacity

shortfalls among African troop contributors, uneven commitment to hosting or joining missions, and the growing salience of sovereignty claims all shape whether formal multilateral operations will be requested or accepted. The ‘state of statehood’ remains an underexplored challenge in African diplomacy: multilateral organisations were predicated on an interventionist spirit that has faltered (Tadesse/Staeger, 2025). Instead, governments are increasingly embracing ad hoc coalitions and private military contractors as more suitable – and perceived as less politically intrusive – responses to contemporary security threats. These changing interests also affect the diplomacy of the AU’s PSC, where finding consensus among its 15 members has proved challenging on issues ranging from climate security to the crisis in eastern DRC. The PSC’s internal obstacles to actually launching a new AU PSO could constitute an unexpected roadblock to the use of Resolution 2719 – bearing in mind that if the AU does not authorise a mission, the UN cannot fund it. Yet if African capitals are excluded from shaping the future of Resolution 2719, the UN-AU process risks producing outcomes disconnected from the political realities and security challenges of AU member states. Predictability, in other words, means not only having a mechanism in place but also ensuring it is politically acceptability.

Second, enhancing sustainability is an equally protracted challenge. This implies not only the ability to maintain funding in the long term, but also meeting today’s needs in ways that do not compromise future actions (United Nations 1987). Politically, this pursuit of sustainability requires African stakeholders to carefully manage relations with the EU and US – the two key stakeholders in African security. In the case of the EU, this means turning Brussel’s fragmented decision making into a more strategic engagement. This could be part of a diplomatic grand bargain that seasoned observers of Africa-EU relations have long called for (Lopes 2024).

With the US, the AU should carefully incorporate Washington’s interests into a sustainable strategy for Resolution 2719. Proposed legislation by the US Congress blocking support for AUSSOM does not reject the principle of Resolution 2719. It instead limits US support for its use to a case that “responds to a new crisis or threat with the demonstrable need for a multi-lateral response led by the African Union, [...] has clear and achievable objectives” and calls on the AU to “encourage the exploration and utilization of alternative funding mechanisms for AUSSOM that do not rely on United Nations asses-

sed contributions” (Sen. Risch, 2025). Therefore, the AU will garner considerable advantage from continuing to diversify its resource mobilisation (Staeger, 2021). Sustainability, in other words, requires the AU to carefully manage the implementation of Resolution 2719 in ways that signal an understanding of US (and other permanent Security Council members’) domestic, fiscal, and political sensitivities.

Third, pragmatic thinking about adequate funding needs to incorporate the dynamics of predictability and sustainability spelled out above. In a diplomatic process overly focused on numbers and not enough on the politics that underlie them, ‘adequate’ is a treacherous notion. UN Security Council members have been frustrated with the AU’s focus on fixing the funding shortfalls of its Somalia missions – whose near two-decades of existence have stopped inspiring diplomats in New York. Any AU request is more likely to be considered ‘adequate’ if it reflects tightening UN peacekeeping budgets; pertains to a new security crisis; and reflects the shift away from expensive and long-term multidimensional peace enforcement. A more pragmatic level of ambition for Resolution 2719 funding may instead be the AU’s more limited Ethiopia-Tigray peace process, or the Quadripartite Mechanism for eastern DRC (which aims to coordinate four different regional mediation efforts). By using Resolution 2719 for such smaller-scale efforts, which can be more realistically financed by the Peace Fund, changes the debate on ‘adequate’ AU contributions. While the Peace Fund cannot be tapped for a mission of AUSSOM’s size, financing more modest interventions could demonstrate African intent in New York.

Conclusion

The AU’s goals of financial autonomy and enhanced partnership with the UN are excitingly optimistic about the future of multilateralism, relevant for African security, and a necessity to address resource shortcomings. Yet, as always in multilateral diplomacy, the devil is in the details of delivery. If implementation continues to stall, Resolution 2719 risks fading into irrelevance as a late bloomer that never translated into operational reality. However, the framework resolution bears rich potential as a site of inter-organisational institutional experimentation in difficult times. As ever, the power of money lies not in the cash itself, but in how it shapes relationships.

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Beyond the Money: Resolution 2719's Potential in Shaping the Future of AU PSOs

Dimpho Deleglise

Adopted on 21 December 2023, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2719 marks a milestone in global peace and security governance. For the first time, it authorises the use of United Nations (UN) assessed contributions to finance African Union (AU) peace support operations (PSOs), recognising them as part of the UN's collective security mandate under the UN Charter (United Nations Security Council, 2023). While this breakthrough addresses the long-standing challenge of ad hoc and unreliable financing of AU missions, its implications extend far beyond funding¹. The resolution reorients attention toward the standards and expectations that will now define the credibility and performance of AU PSOs. This shift comes as AU missions, often mandated for robust or offensive operations, are deployed in contexts marked by overlapping security, political, and humanitarian challenges. These environments are increasingly shaped by asymmetric and hybrid threats—ranging from disinformation and proxy warfare to the erosion of state authority – which have fundamentally altered the operational terrain, blurring the lines between combatants and civilians and complicating both mandate implementation and accountability (UN, 2023; Aning & Abdallah, 2016a). In such contexts, legitimacy is not determined by operational performance alone but by perception: whether missions are seen as impartial, accountable, and genuinely protective of civilians amid competing and overlapping political and security pressures (Deleglise, 2024).

While Resolution 2719 has rightly been celebrated for unlocking predictable UN financing for AU PSOs, its deeper significance lies in how it redefines the conditions of credibility and legitimacy in AU-led interventions. The resolution shifts the debate from how missions are funded to how they are designed, managed, and held accountable in complex conflict environments. It positions compliance, civilian protection, and gender respon-

siveness, not as optional enhancements, but as core benchmarks of legitimacy and effectiveness. In this sense, Resolution 2719 does more than provide resources for AU peace operations – it clarifies the principles and standards by which their performance and integrity will be assessed.

Translating these normative commitments into practice, however, requires more than political agreement or financial predictability. It calls for robust institutional arrangements, and clear operational guidance, to embed compliance and protection standards into mission planning and conduct. This is the purpose of the AU-UN Joint Workstream on Compliance and Protection of Civilians, which brings together both organisations to define the standards, procedures, and accountability mechanisms that will shape the next generation of AU PSOs. Under Resolution 2719, adherence to international human rights law (IHRL) and international humanitarian law (IHL) – together with more localised and gender-responsive approaches to civilian protection – is no longer aspirational but a baseline condition for political backing and sustained support.

The creation of the workstream is significant because it brings together two institutions with distinct doctrinal traditions. The UN's peacekeeping model – originally designed for inter-state conflicts – rests on the principles of consent, impartiality, and limited use of force, serving primarily as a buffer between parties to enable political dialogue (United Nations Department of Peace Operations, 2008). The AU, by contrast, has frequently undertaken enforcement or kinetic operations in asymmetric environments where there is no clear “other party” to separate, and where protecting civilians or countering insurgencies requires proactive military engagement (Aning & Abdallah, 2016b). The workstream provides a platform to reconcile these approaches, ensuring that offensive mandates and protection imperatives reinforce rather than undermine one another, and that AU-UN cooperation evolves beyond the sequential “AU-first, UN-takeover” model toward shared responsibility and mutually reinforcing standards.

¹ UN peacekeeping missions are primarily funded with assessed contributions from all UN member states, based on their gross national incomes. The P5 members contribute more, while others pay according to their capacity. Voluntary contributions from member states or other actors may also support specific missions or initiatives.

This normative shift unfolds amid growing uncertainty about the strategic purpose and future of multilateral peace operations. AU and UN missions deployed in complex theatres – from Somalia and Mali to South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) – have faced mounting criticism over limited impact, civilian harm, and weak community engagement (Giffen & Mokhefi, 2022). Failures to protect civilians and allegations of misconduct have, in some cases, fuelled public disillusionment, eroding both trust and political support. At the same time, donor fatigue and shifting geopolitical priorities have further weakened confidence in large, resource-intensive peacekeeping models. The accelerated drawdowns of MONUSCO in the DRC and MINUSMA in Mali signal not only logistical transitions, but also a broader retreat from missions increasingly seen as lacking legitimacy and measurable impact.²

Since 2016, the AU has steadily advanced its own agenda to strengthen accountability within peace operations, developing legal frameworks, conduct standards, and mechanisms to protect civilians. Resolution 2719 builds on this trajectory rather than redirecting it, lending political and financial weight to reforms already underway. By embedding compliance, civilian protection, and gender responsiveness as core operational norms rather than aspirational principles, the resolution affirms African leadership in shaping credible, rights-based missions. This chapter argues that institutionalising these standards offers the AU a strategic opportunity to consolidate its evolving model of peace support operations, not as reactive stabilisation tools, but as locally legitimate and normatively grounded responses to the continent's complex security realities.

Why the workstream on compliance and protection of civilians matters

Under Resolution 2719, AU PSOs become eligible for UN-assessed contributions only if they meet clearly defined operational and normative benchmarks. To advance this agenda, joint AU-UN workstreams have been established under the Task Team on the Operationalisation of Security Council Resolution 2719, bringing together technical experts from both institutions, including the UN Office to the African Union (UNOAU). Far from a bureaucratic exercise, these workstreams are crucial for

building interoperability and coherence across hybrid, parallel, or jointly authorised missions. Among them, the workstream on Compliance and Protection of Civilians is particularly significant. It brings together the AU Peace Support Operations Division, UNOAU, the UN Department of Peace Operations, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Its mandate is both ambitious and essential: to develop harmonised standard operating procedures (SOPs), accountability tools, and mission-level guidance that ensure AU PSOs comply with international humanitarian and human rights law, implement effective protection strategies, and embed gender-responsive approaches in line with Resolution 1325. This resolution addresses the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls and calls for their full and equal participation in peace and security processes, including conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and post-conflict recovery.

The collaboration matters because the AU and UN engage in peace operations from distinct doctrinal standpoints. The UN model is anchored in principles of state consent, impartiality, and the limited use of force – core to Chapter VI of the UN Charter – and designed to maintain neutrality while enabling political dialogue. The AU, by contrast, has developed a more agile and interventionist posture, built around rapid deployment and robust missions in volatile theatres where full consent is often absent³. Such operational assertiveness, though frequently necessary, generates complex political and legal dilemmas that the workstream on compliance and civilian protection must help navigate.

Translating Resolution 2719's promise into practice will hinge as much on political will and negotiation as on technical design. AU PSOs unfold in politically charged environments where sovereignties, regional mandates, and UN oversight intersect. These overlaps are not confrontational but structural: the AU authorises and commands, the UN finances and monitors standards, while host states assert authority over their territory. This layered jurisdiction creates a dense governance terrain in which decisions on conduct, accountability, and the use of force must navigate multiple centres of legitimacy. Even where compliance frameworks exist – such as the AU's 2023 Strategic Framework for Compliance and Accountability in Peace Support Operations – the mechanisms for investigation, sanction, and victim redress are still evolving. The sensitivities of host and troop-contributing countries (TCCs) add another dimension: host governments may view external monitoring as an encroachment on sovereignty, while some TCCs remain cautious over closer oversight. At the same time, Security Council financing conditionalities can be perceived as a

² Results of civil society consultations and public surveys conducted by FES offices in Mali, South Sudan, the DRC, Mozambique, Cameroon and Ethiopia, as captured in Deleglise, D (2024). Towards people-centred international peace support operations in Africa: A role for civil society. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/fes-pscc/21559.pdf>.

³ See UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, (2008; AU, 2019.)

form of disguised tutelage over African decision-making. Sustaining the credibility compact envisioned by Resolution 2719 therefore requires deft political navigation – balancing ownership with accountability, asserting African agency within partnership frameworks, and ensuring that compliance mechanisms reinforce rather than dilute continental legitimacy.

It is within this delicate balance that international law functions as both foundation and test. Both the AU and the UN are bound by IHL and IHRL, which not only govern conduct in conflict, but also define the ethical boundaries within which missions must operate. Unlike IHL, which applies in situations of armed conflict, IHRL applies at all times, placing continuous obligations on missions to uphold the right to life, prevent arbitrary detention and torture, prohibit discrimination, and protect against sexual exploitation and abuse. In fragile or complicit state contexts, peace operations often become de facto guarantors of these rights, making compliance not merely a legal requirement but a determinant of political legitimacy and moral authority.

These tensions are most visible in the domain of civilian protection, where operational mandates, political constraints, and normative obligations collide. While both the AU and UN affirm that the primary responsibility rests with the state, protection of civilians (PoC) has become an increasingly prominent feature of mission mandates. Yet its implementation remains uneven and politically fraught. Missions are expected to protect civilians while maintaining host-state consent, preserving neutrality, and operating in active conflict – competing imperatives that often pull in opposite directions. In practice, PoC risks being reduced to a symbolic presence or subordinated to counter-insurgency objectives. The dilemma is most acute when the host state itself constitutes the threat: can missions protect without confronting, or remain impartial without appearing complicit? For AU PSOs, these are not abstract debates but the operational fault lines along which legitimacy is continually tested.

Understanding compliance and protection also requires attention to the social hierarchies and power relations that shape how violence and vulnerability are produced. Among these, gender differences and dynamics are central in shaping the credibility and effectiveness of PSOs. A credible approach to civilian protection cannot afford to be gender-blind, a point on which the AU and UN converge. Conflict is inherently gendered – both in its impacts and in how violence is experienced, reported, and addressed. Women and girls are disproportionately subjected to sexual and gender-based violence, while men and boys face distinct risks such as forced recruitment, arbitrary detention, and unacknowledged trauma (Amnesty International, 2004). Yet gender is not limited to experiences of vulnerability; it also shapes resilience,

community leadership, and informal mediation roles that are vital to sustaining peace at the local level.

For the AU, gender responsiveness has evolved from a normative commitment under the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda into an operational principle integrated across its doctrine, training, and mission planning. Gender advisers have been deployed in several AU missions, while the AU Commission's Gender, Peace and Security Programme supports the integration of gender perspectives throughout the planning, conduct, and evaluation of its PSOs (AU, 2015).

This institutional evolution reflects a recognition that protection strategies must be informed by gender-sensitive risk analysis and grounded in the lived experiences of affected communities. Ongoing efforts to implement Resolution 1325 seek to translate its four pillars – participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery – into mission-wide practice rather than ad hoc activities. This entails integrating gender perspectives into early warning, operational planning, and post-conflict recovery, ensuring that protection is not only about shielding civilians from harm but about enabling communities to shape their own security outcomes and strengthening the social legitimacy of peace operations.

Strengthening compliance, civilian protection, and gender responsiveness

Drawing from the AU-UN Workstream on Compliance and Protection of Civilians, this section identifies areas where stronger operational standards and joint approaches can reinforce the credibility and local legitimacy of AU PSOs.

Compliance

In 2023, the AU adopted the Strategic Framework for Compliance and Accountability in Peace Support Operations (AUCF), which codifies how missions are to uphold IHL and IHRL standards of conduct, and protection obligations in complex theatres of conflict (AUC, 2023). Recognising the fluid and often high-risk environments in which PSOs operate, the framework sets out a preventive, corrective, and accountability-driven approach to misconduct and compliance (AUC, 2023: 12-14). These commitments are translated into operational practice through mission-level instruments such as Rules of Engagement (ROEs), Letters of Assist (LoAs), Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and Force Commander Directives (FCDs), which connect legal norms to tactical decision-making and command responsibility.

The AUCF moves beyond aspirational language to establish concrete mechanisms for lawful and disciplined conduct. It formalises the AU's shift from reactive crisis management to preventive accountability, making compliance an operational function rather than a rhetorical commitment. The framework introduced behavioural standards, internal investigative procedures, and remedial action for victims. It underscores that protecting civilians is not only a legal obligation but a condition for the legitimacy and continued political support of missions⁴. Integrity and accountability, it argues, shape local perceptions and, with it, the prospects for sustainable peace (AUC, 2023:11).

Much of the framework draws on operational lessons from Somalia, where the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) faced allegations of sexual exploitation, abuse of displaced women and girls, and civilian killings. In response, the AU appointed conduct and disciplinary officers in the field, strengthened reporting mechanisms, and expanded community outreach (Stern, 2014). AMISOM also revised its Indirect Fire Policy to minimise incidental harm and, in 2012, established the Civilian Casualty Tracking, Analysis and Response Cell (CCTARC) to document and address civilian harm – an early example of learning-based accountability in AU PSOs.

Despite these advances, the implementation of the AUCF remains inconsistent across missions. Investigative procedures are often constrained by limited resources, political sensitivities, or hindered by national caveats – restrictions imposed by some troop contributing countries on how their personnel may be investigated or sanctioned. Follow-up mechanisms can lack uniformity, and field-level accountability has heavily depended on the discretion of mission leadership⁵. The screening of uniformed personnel remains uneven, remedial pathways for victims are limited, and civil-military coordination on protection requires further consolidation⁶. Efforts to integrate civilian perspectives into mission planning – particularly in identifying and addressing threats – have increased, especially through community liaison initiatives and protection coordination structures. However, translating these practices into consistent, mission-wide approaches remains an ongoing institutional priority.

The UN for its part has institutionalised its approach through the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP), an important reference point for shaping pro-

tection standards in complex peace operations. AMISOM adopted elements of the HRDDP to strengthen accountability and elevate PoC as a core operational priority. Through this lens, the mission introduced mitigation measures to reduce civilian harm, advanced child-protection protocols, and developed structured risk-assessment processes through mechanisms such as the Civil-Military Coordination Working Group and the National Protection Group⁷.

The AU-UN workstream, now prioritises deepening complementarity between the two compliance frameworks. The priority is to strengthen interoperability between the AU's compliance framework and the HRDDP, ensuring that shared principles – compliance with IHL and IHRL, prevention of harm, and responsiveness to protection risks – are consistently embedded across operational tools and practices. This involves developing joint SOPs for risk assessments, shared reporting channels for alleged violations, and coordinated approaches to investigations and follow-up⁸. The objective is not to replicate systems but to foster mutual recognition and adaptability, equipping AU missions with context-specific tools that make accountability and protection, integrated mission-wide responsibilities.

The AU's growing institutional focus with compliance is also supported through a tripartite partnership with the European Union (EU) and the UN, dedicated to strengthening the integration of human rights into peace operations.⁹ Although still at an early stage, this collaboration offers a platform for targeted technical support – particularly in areas such as training, early warning, and the anticipation and management of human rights risks¹⁰. Its added value lies in reinforcing the AU's normative leadership by facilitating shared tools and standards that are adaptable to AU-led missions, rather than being externally imposed.

Ultimately, ensuring meaningful compliance is not just about having the right frameworks on paper – it is about how they work in practice. Investigations must be independent, properly resourced, and insulated from political interference. Disciplinary measures should be applied consistently and communicated transparently, while serious cases should be referred to national or regional ju-

⁴ Author's interviews with AU, UNOAU, and EU peace and security officials and practitioners, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 28 October–1 November 2024.

⁵ Author's interviews with AU, UNOAU, and EU peace and security officials and practitioners, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 28 October–1 November 2024.

⁶ Author's interviews with AU, UNOAU, and EU peace and security officials and practitioners, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 28 October–1 November

⁷ Author's interviews with AU, UNOAU, and EU peace and security officials and practitioners, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 28 October–1 November

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⁹ Author's interviews with AU, UNOAU, and EU peace and security officials and practitioners, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 28 October–1 November

¹⁰ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2022, 22 November). African Union-EU-UN partnership project launched to support AU Peace Support Operations compliance framework, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/11/african-union-eu-un-partnership-project-launched-support-au-peace-support>.

dicial authorities for prosecution. Equally important is prevention: troop- and police-contributing countries must receive rigorous pre-deployment training on AU codes of conduct and applicable international law, so that accountability is embedded from the outset of deployment ¹¹.

Finally, compliance must also become participatory. Civilian engagement is essential not only for legitimacy but for institutional learning. Community-based feedback mechanisms should be formalised to capture local perspectives on protection risks, mission conduct, and trust dynamics – providing actionable insights for risk assessments and operational planning. Secure reporting channels could be piloted to enable civilians to raise concerns or report harm without fear of reprisal. Such approaches help shift compliance from a hierarchical exercise to a shared process of accountability, linking legal standards with the lived experiences of the communities that peace operations are meant to protect.

The Protection of Civilians

Peace operations are often caught between moral expectations, political authorisations, and practical constraints – and this gap defines the difficulty of protecting civilians in practice. Civilians frequently look to PSOs for genuine protection from violence, regardless of the formal limits of their mandates. When these expectations are not met, missions risk eroding public confidence, or in some situations, being perceived as complicit through inaction. The gap between expectations and capacity makes PoC not only a measure of operational effectiveness, but also a test of legitimacy of a mission in the eyes of local populations and even international partners. How mandates are formulated is therefore decisive. The experience of the AU Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), which succeeded ATMIS in 2025, illustrates this dilemma (UNSC, 2024). Although the AU Peace and Security Council's 2012 directive calls for the integration of PoC across all AU PSOs, AUSSOM's stabilisation-oriented mandate and its focus on supporting Somali security forces reveal the continuing tension between policy commitments and operational priorities. When mandates prioritise stabilisation without clear PoC provisions, protection risks becoming secondary or inconsistently applied.

Both the AU and UN have developed PoC guidelines based on shared humanitarian principles, yet their doctrinal and political approaches diverge in important ways. The UN conceives PoC as a whole-of-mission responsibility, implemented under consent-based mandates and

guided by the restrained use of force¹². Protection is pursued in close coordination with humanitarian partners but remains constrained by the political and legal parameters of traditional peacekeeping. In practice, UN peacekeepers provide physical protection primarily through deterrence, visibility, and community presence – patrolling, establishing community alert networks, and liaising through community liaison assistants (United Nations Department of Peace Operations, 2020). These tools enhance proximity to local populations but also reflect the UN's cautious posture, particularly in contexts where host-state consent is delicate or where protecting civilians could entail confronting government or allied forces. The UN continues to face the challenge of balancing its responsibility to protect civilians with the political need to maintain host-state consent.

The AU's PoC doctrine departs markedly from this restraint. Its four-pillar framework – protection through political processes, physical protection, rights-based protection, and the creation of a protective environment – reflects a more integrated and assertive vision of civilian protection (AUC, 2023: 15). Unlike traditional peacekeeping, AU PSOs are often deployed into active conflict settings and, at times, without full state consent, compelling missions to blend stabilisation, counterinsurgency, and protection roles. Such operational assertiveness can improve responsiveness to civilian threats but also raises higher political and moral expectations: if AU missions claim robust mandates, they must demonstrate credible mechanisms to prevent and respond to harm. AU missions must constantly balance acting decisively to protect civilians with staying within legal and political limits. If they do not act, they lose credibility for failing to protect; if they act too forcefully, they risk accusations of overreach.

Within the AU-UN Workstream on Compliance and Protection of Civilians, ongoing efforts aim to bridge the doctrinal and operational differences between the two organisations. Key areas of focus include clarifying the conditions under which force may be used in protection tasks, calibrating protection mandates in joint deployments, and designing mission-specific PoC strategies that align political constraints with operational needs.¹³ The value of this approach lies in institutionalising a shared understanding of what “protection” entails across both organisations – ensuring that the AU's emphasis on robust action and the UN's commitment to restraint can coexist within a coherent accountability framework.

¹¹ Author's interviews with AU, UNOAU, and EU peace and security officials and practitioners, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 28 October–1 November

¹² See, United Nations Department of Peace Operations. (2019). The protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping. United Nations, p. 6-7, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/2023_protection_of_civilians_policy.pdf.

¹³ Author's interviews with AU, UNOAU, and EU peace and security officials and practitioners, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 28 October–1 November

Another promising area of AU-UN collaboration concerns how missions engage with the communities they are meant to protect. The UN has developed formal tools such as community liaison assistants, and field-based protection monitoring to support structured engagement with local populations. The AU, for its part, has accumulated extensive field experience in community outreach and mediation through its missions – though these practices have yet to be consolidated into common operational guidance. Given that many AU missions operate in fluid and politically complex environments, sustained engagement with local populations is indispensable; not only for consultation, but for early warning, trust-building, and legitimacy. Developing AU-specific guidelines for community engagement would not require a doctrinal overhaul but rather the operationalisation of existing commitments – through context-driven tools that define clear roles, feedback mechanisms, and decision-making channels. Incorporating these processes into mission planning and command structures would make civilian protection an operational priority shared across all levels of leadership.

Gender responsiveness

In many peace support operations, gender responsiveness has been treated as a question of representation rather than as something that directly affects how effective a mission is. Yet Resolution 1325 and its successors make it clear that women, men, girls, and boys experience and respond to conflicts in profoundly gendered ways – shaping patterns that influence their vulnerability, agency, and protection needs. Women and girls are frequently targeted through sexual and gender-based violence, reflecting the symbolic power attached to their bodies as bearers of cultural or community identity (UN, 2000: 3-4). At the same time, they play active roles within conflict settings – as negotiators, community protectors, or, in some cases, as members of armed groups (UN, 2000: 4). Recognising this dual reality moves PSOs beyond a victim-centric framing toward one that acknowledges women's political and social agency as integral to both protection and peacebuilding alike. This, in turn, requires translating the four pillars of Resolution 1325 into operational practice: ensuring the full and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of mission structures, as military, police and civilian personnel; strengthening protection mechanisms against sexual and gender-based violence; enhancing prevention through early warning, accountability, and the prosecution of perpetrators of violations; and delivering relief and recovery responses that are sensitive to the specific needs and lived realities of women and girls.

While the AU and the UN share common gender commitments in peace support operations, their approaches reflect distinct institutional logics. The AU's engagement

has largely focused on gender mainstreaming – embedding gender considerations in policy, planning and representation, with an emphasis on increasing the participation of women in leadership and decision-making roles¹⁴. This approach gained early traction within AU PSOs because it fitted more readily within existing bureaucratic structures and political commitments, without fundamentally reshaping operational practice on the ground. The UN, by contrast, has advanced toward gender-responsive protection, which builds on mainstreaming but extends it to how gender dynamics shape real-time vulnerabilities and protection outcomes. It uses gender-disaggregated data, contextual risk analysis, and adaptive responses tailored to the differentiated needs of women, men, girls and boys. In this sense, gender responsiveness moves beyond representational equity to redefine how missions perceive and respond to insecurity, making gender not an additive concern, but a central lens through which protection itself is understood.

Bridging these two approaches is essential for realising the full intent of Resolution 1325 in AU-led operations. For the AU, this does not require abandoning mainstreaming but deepening it. Missions should be equipped to address the distinct vulnerabilities and strategic agency of women, men, girls, and boys: rooting gender responsiveness not in assumptions but in local insight and accountability. This requires embedding gender advisers not only at headquarters but within mission planning cells, field components, and civil-military coordination structures. They should participate in threat assessments alongside operational planners, ensuring that risks such as gender-based violence, forced recruitment, mobility restrictions, or the targeting of specific groups inform tactical decisions and protection strategies. Structured engagement with women's and youth associations should form part of routine intelligence-gathering and feedback loops, transforming community interaction from consultation to co-design. In short, gender responsiveness must evolve from a thematic priority into a core logic of legitimacy and operational credibility – determining how missions perceive threats, allocate resources, and measure success.

Conclusion

Resolution 2719 marks a turning point in the political and normative relationship between the AU and the UN on peace operations – not so much because it unlocks new financing, but because it redefines the very terms on which legitimacy, accountability, and effectiveness of

¹⁴ Author's interviews with AU, UNOAU, and EU peace and security officials and practitioners, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 28 October–1 November

PSOs are judged. By tying financial support to compliance, protection, and gender responsiveness, the resolution establishes a shared accountability framework that aligns political legitimacy with operational standards in African peace operations. Translating this normative shift into operational reality, however, will depend less on technical harmonisation than on sustained political negotiation. The AU-UN Workstream on Compliance and Protection of Civilians offers a key platform for this dialogue, yet its success will hinge on addressing deeper tensions: between ownership and oversight, between political expediency and normative consistency, and between the imperatives of protection and the logic of military partnership. What is ultimately at stake is not only the integrity of AU PSOs, but their ability to sustain legitimacy in contexts where alliances are fluid and the line between peacekeeper and party to conflict is increasingly difficult to draw.

For the AU, the challenge ahead is less about starting something new than about deepening what has already begun. Since 2016, the AU has been putting in place the building blocks of institutional accountability – embedding compliance standards in command structures, creating conduct and discipline mechanisms, and developing practical tools for civilian protection and gender integration. Resolution 2719 raises the stakes of this effort. It calls for stronger coherence across missions, more transparent oversight, and closer alignment between political

intent and operational practice. Meeting these expectations will require not just technical reforms, but political will and clarity of purpose within the AU and its partnerships.

Yet the politics of peacekeeping remain complex. While Resolution 2719 outlines a framework for shared responsibility, it also risks reviving older hierarchies if compliance is used as a tool of external control rather than mutual accountability. The UN's role in managing funds and setting benchmarks could, even unintentionally, limit African agency – reproducing the same bureaucratic constraints that have long challenged UN operations. Preserving African leadership in this partnership will therefore depend on constant negotiation: asserting strategic autonomy while maintaining credibility within a rules-based international order.

The task, then, is not to emulate the UN model, but to consolidate a distinctly African approach to peace operations – one that draws on proximity, contextual intelligence, and political adaptability to advance protection and accountability in ways that are both principled and practical. Resolution 2719 is thus less the end of a financing debate than the beginning of a new credibility compact. It offers the AU both a test and an opportunity: to demonstrate that African-led operations can define the future of legitimate intervention, setting standards not by imitation, but by example.

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Stabilization or Exploitation? Non-traditional Peace Actors in the Horn of Africa

An interview with Edmund Yakani, president of the East African Civil Society Organisations' Forum (EACSOF)

Ulrich Thum: In recent years, the Horn of Africa has seen the rise of non-traditional state actors getting involved in peace support efforts in the regions. Unlike traditional state and multilateral actors in institutionalized peace support, such as the United Nations, the African Union, the US, the EU and other Western donor countries; the Gulf States, Turkey, China, India and Russia have been involved mainly through bilateral diplomacy, economic investment and religious ties often outside formal multilateral frameworks. What role are non-traditional state actors playing in terms of peace support in recent years in the Horn of Africa?

Edmund Yakani: Generally, peace support efforts in the Horn of Africa are marked by conflicting interests. Take the UAE, for example, while presenting itself as a promoter of peace and security, it at the same time undermines functioning governments that do not align with its agenda. This raises the question of how to engage such “new” peace actors, and how to make clear that genuine peacekeeping means prioritizing peace and stability over vested interests.

China's role is different. It has become more active and visible and has even appointed a special envoy for the Horn of Africa and deployed troops to UN missions like in South Sudan. At the same time, Chinese multinational companies are investing in governments engaged in conflict, effectively strengthening their ability to wage war. The critical question, then, is how to engage China so that its investments do not fuel violence or undermine regional stability.

We need to demand transparency and accountability from the outset from all actors, rather than waiting until they might already be pursuing secret deals under the cover of peace support.

UT: The new US Administration is drastically changing how it engages with the region. While it is not clear how this will look like, it becomes evident that there will be a

sharp decline in its funding of development aid and humanitarian assistance. What effect can this “retreat” have on the conflict dynamics in the region?

Yakani: This really depends on whether the new actors are willing to invest resources, use their influence, and channel real energy into driving peace and security forward. But the withdrawal of traditional actors from financing development, peace, and security, particularly by the US, threatens to undermine the modest gains made in securing relatively peaceful political transitions in the region. Without strong support, these processes risk collapsing back into instability.

My concern is that a vacuum left by strong traditional actors could be exploited by spoilers. If new actors prioritize vested interests over peace and stability, their involvement could be disastrous. However, if they take political responsibility seriously, demanding the protection of civilians, and supporting transitions from violence to peace, — then their engagement could be constructive.

UT: China's contribution to UNMISS represents a shift in its global peace and security stance. It currently deploys over 1000 troops to the mission. At the same time, China abstained from the vote on the extension of the UNMISS mandate.

Yakani: China seeks to position itself as a global influencer, shaping international agendas, but its national interests clearly come first. In South Sudan, China is the largest oil investor with billions in unrecovered loans. As violence persists, its companies and nationals face risks and that motivates Beijing to join peacekeeping missions, both to safeguard its interests and to have eyes on the ground.

South Sudan illustrates how vested national interests drive engagement in international peace and security. How such actors balance their national interests with

the responsibility to uphold peace and security will determine if peacekeeping risks being reshaped in ways that undermine its traditional purpose.

UT: With the creation of BRICS Plus there is now a multilateral institution with two members from the wider Horn of Africa, Egypt and Ethiopia. Can we expect BRICS Plus to actively support peace efforts in the region?

Yakani: I fear BRICS+ may fall into the same trap as the African Union. When the OAU transformed into the AU, it raised hopes, but those hopes were undermined by members with conflicting interests. Such divisions weakened the AU's ability to build consensus for mediation, peacekeeping, and broader peace and security efforts. For example, Ethiopia and Egypt are both members of BRICS Plus, yet they remain locked in deep political disputes with major implications for regional peace and security. How could BRICS credibly mediate between them? We have already seen how IGAD failed to build consensus in similar situations, because too many members had vested interests in conflicts in South Sudan, Sudan, or Ethiopia itself.

If BRICS simply follows the traditional formats, it is unlikely to make a difference. But if it creates a stronger, more credible framework, perhaps similar to the ECOWAS model before its decline, it could avoid these pitfalls.

UT: In recent years, the United Arab Emirates has probably become one of the most enterprising external actors in the Horn and is much criticized. How would you assess its engagement?

Yakani: My observation is that the UAE is undermining long-term peace and stability in the Horn of Africa by targeting functional governments and weakening fragile states even further. The region has effectively become a playground for Gulf rivalries, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE exporting their diplomatic and political conflicts into the Horn. Each side undermines any government perceived as an ally of its opponents, turning the region into an arena for proxy competition.

Sudan is the a case in point. The UAE and Saudi Arabia back opposing sides, fuelling conflict and undermining state institutions, many of which have been strategically weakened or destroyed. In this sense, the UAE's role has been destructive, making stabilization far more difficult.

South Sudan is also being drawn into this dynamic. The UAE uses South Sudan as a convenient platform for its involvement in Sudan. Through loans, it weakens South Sudan's political independence while increasing its debt burden. Reports of RSF operatives moving freely in

South Sudan, including to collect fuel, suggest that UAE influence is enabling such activities.

In return for financial support, the UAE is likely to seek concessions, for example, access to arable land for large-scale farming, producing food to be exported back to the Gulf. This creates an additional layer of dependency for South Sudan while serving UAE interests. Rather than strengthening fragile states, UAE engagement risks deepening crises by pursuing its own geopolitical and economic interests.

UT: How do you see Turkey's role across the region, and what drives its growing presence in mediation but also in in other sectors?

Yakani: Turkey uses a form of soft power, not aggressive, but also not very strategic. Turkey's involvement in peace and security in the region remains hesitant. In South Sudan, for instance, its role is visible but largely behind the scenes. Turkey engages in a region that is already shaped by various vested interests, both globally and locally, which limits its ability to shape outcomes directly.

Its contribution is modest and mostly supportive: providing military aid, uniforms, medical equipment, and some assistance to build state capacity for peace and stability. These efforts help, but only at a small scale. Where Turkey falls short is in taking a bold political stance. It has not positioned itself as a decisive or influential player in peace and security, preferring a quieter role rather than openly defining how it wants to get engaged.

UT: Different external actors want stability in the Horn, but they are often driven by different strategic interests and value settings. Do you nonetheless see prospects for coordination and partnerships rather than competition?

Yakani: One interesting phenomenon we've seen in the wider region, for instance in the Great Lakes, is cooperation between a former "big player" like the US and a relatively smaller nation such as Qatar. Together, they pressed for a peace deal in the DRC. While it remains to be seen how successful this will be, it may point to a new model of engagement.

But this new model also risks becoming transactional. The DRC illustrates this: peace and security there increasingly reflect transactional behaviour rather than collective responsibility. Turning peace and security into a commodity sets a dangerous precedent. It risks commercializing an agenda that should serve the common interest of citizens. In fragile states, this mirrors how natural resources have long been exploited to fuel violence —

except now peacekeeping itself risks becoming a cover for vested interests of powerful states.

The DRC–Rwanda dynamic reflects this trend: economic leverage is used to gain political acceptance, rather than applying the traditional formats of peace and security engagement. The question remains whether there is genuine political will to deliver on such deals, or whether they simply entrench power imbalances.

At its core, peace and security are always political. That is why China, for example, finds itself in an awkward po-

sition: contributing troops under the UN's "blue helmet" while still clinging to its principle of non-interference. The moment a state deploys soldiers in peacekeeping, it is already entering political terrain. China's hesitation to renew UN mandates while simultaneously sending troops illustrates this contradiction. This is also the trap UAE and others must avoid. Approaching peace and security on a transactional basis undermines credibility, weakens trust, and risks turning fragile contexts into arenas for exploitation rather than stability.

Peacekeeping and Domestic Politics in Mali: The Case of MINUSMA

Abdoul Sogodogo

The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) deployed into a security and political context complicated by the proliferation of terrorist groups and the shifting interests of the main parties: the Malian state and the Azawad secessionists. The state that requested the intervention of the UN force subsequently perceived it as an obstacle to recovering territorial sovereignty. The secessionist forces, initially less enthusiastic about the intervention at the outset, ended up using the mission as a source of international legitimacy. Despite attempts at dialogue, these antagonistic positions remained deadlocked due to deep mistrust between the parties, an unresolved struggle for power, and a security situation worsened by the rise of jihadist terrorism. In 2023, the Mali government ordered the mission to withdraw.

This chapter draws on speeches, MINUSMA reports, and interviews with Malian actors to understand the Malian challenges to the implementation of the UN mandate in Mali. Its originality lies in its analysis of the influence of the domestic Malian security and political context, highlighting how local political realities, which were not integrated into the design of the mandate, influenced the critical public perception of the mission, illustrating “the revenge of context” (Oliver de Sardan 2021).

The analysis is divided into three parts. First, it examines the context surrounding the mission’s deployment in 2013 to show how early tensions reflected an underlying mismatch between the UN’s mandate and Bamako’s priorities. Second, it explores MINUSMA’s struggle to implement the fragile 2015 Algiers Agreement to illustrate why and how the Mali government eventually rejected MINUSMA’s mandate and the peace process it existed to support. Third and finally, it addresses the political instrumentalization of MINUSMA by both national and secessionist actors.

Deploying without a peace to keep? A flawed foundation.

Over the course of 2012, an alliance of successionist rebels and jihadist militants swept through northern Mali. While the secessionists briefly established a breakaway state of “Azawad” in northern Mali, the alliance between secessionist and Jihadist factions quickly collapsed. Emerging victoriously from the split, the Jihadist forces advanced towards Bamako in early 2013, determined to remake Mali as a fundamentalist Islamic state. A timely French military intervention - “Operation Serval” – fought alongside the Malian army and Chadian troops to defeat the armed groups and returned nearly every city to government control. However, the international forces allowed the Azawad militants to remain in several northern towns. In June 2023, a shaky ceasefire and promise of further negotiations between Malian and secular successionist forces was agreed in Ouagadougou.

It was to stabilize this fragile situation that the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was established by UN Security Council Resolution 2100 on April 25, 2013 and launched in July.

The resolution defined MINUSMA’s initial mandate in seven points: restoring state authority, supporting dialogue and the electoral process, protecting civilians, promoting human rights, and supporting national and international justice. With Resolution 2164 of June 25, 2014, this mandate was refocused on priorities such as security, stabilization, protection of civilians, and political dialogue. These priorities continued to evolve each year, distancing the mission from its initial objectives, and contributing to the Malian government’s eventual request for the mission’s withdrawal.

In hindsight, the adoption of Resolution 2100 in a context of ongoing conflict was inadequate. When the Security Council adopted the resolution in April 2013 there still was no true “peace agreement,” and the fragile June 2013 ceasefire didn’t solve this problem. There was no peace to keep in Mali, it would have to be built.

The first challenge MINUSMA faced was the 2013 presidential election, held even though the northern town of Kidal was still under by Azawad militant control. Tensions surrounding the election further undermined trust between the new authorities and the armed groups. The president elected, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, refused to receive the UN Special Representative, Bert Koenders in 2013 (Legrand, 2014), foreshadowing difficult relations between the UN mission and the Malian authorities. In 2014, fighting between the two sides briefly broke out in Kidal when the Prime Minister attempted to visit the city, before a new ceasefire was reached.

In 2015, MINUSMA played a key role in negotiating the Algiers Peace Agreement that superseded the 2013 and 2014 ceasefires. Finally, there was a peace agreement for MINUSMA to support. The fate of MINUSMA would be closely linked to the 2015 agreement. Unfortunately, few civil society organization were engaged in the peace process. Forums for public explanation and debate were organized for the agreement roadmap and the draft, but they were boycotted by the political opposition (Naffet, 2018). These internal challenges set the stage for continuing public criticism over MINUSMA’s mandate and the mission’s domestic unpopularity in Mali (Mali-Mètre 2021-2023 polls).

The 2015 peace process was further undermined by two other issues. First, UN only negotiated with the separatist National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA). They completely ignored powerful jihadist groups that remained highly influential (Interview, Bamako). Without attempting to include all stakeholders, the jihadists were poised to spoil any agreement.

The second issue was the sheer diversity of interests that needed to be managed. The implementation of the Agreement was disrupted several times by armed clashes between signatories, such as in 2015, when the pro-government GATIA militia attacked and drove out the successionist/federalist CMA from the city of Anéfis (Jeune Afrique, 2015).

The government of Mali and the UN mission faced a different understanding of the situation. MINUSMA eventually came to see its mission as to facilitate a peace process between secular secessionists and the Mali government. However, without an agreement in place, in-

ternational support for a peace process was in conflict with the Malian priority of reasserting its sovereignty. This tension was displayed by the difficulty in holding elections in Kidal, the exclusion of powerful jihadist groups, and repeated clashes by signatories to the 2015 agreement.

MINUSMA meets Malian resistance

This fundamental misalignment would quickly generate animosity. “Normal” UN peacekeeping tactics, such as the creation of buffer zones between combatants, were seen as an assault on national sovereignty. MINUSMA struggled to implement the 2015 agreement amidst differences in interpretation and the questionable good faith of the parties involved. As the agreement faltered, MINUSMA increasingly met resistance by the Malian government and public.

The agreement also did not address the conflicting interests of the Malian government or the armed separatist groups (Sogodogo, 2024). The Malian government aimed to rebuild social cohesion on the basis of the agreement, with a proposal for decentralization and political reforms. Meanwhile, the separatists demanded a federalist state. The implementation of the Agreement was further complicated by the fragmentation of signatory armed groups, the lack of inclusivity in the negotiations, and the political crisis that began in 2020. As a result, peace on the ground remained elusive. Armed groups such as the CMA and JNIM continuing to carry out attacks against civilians, massacring villages, and imposing summary justice and forced levies in the form of “zakat.”

The buffer zone issue remains emblematic of the situation. In 2015, General Oumar Bikimo, deputy commander-in-chief of MINUSMA, outlines the use of these zones: “We have taken security measures in Anéfis, but also in Kidal. We deemed it necessary to establish a 20-kilometer security zone around Kidal. These measures are certainly temporary, but they remain in force to this day” (Jeune Afrique, 2015). This prevented the Malian Armed Forces and allied pro-government militia from recapturing the territories occupied (Kidal) by the successionist-jihadist coalition. Because MINUSMA is widely perceived in Mali as an obstacle to peace, much of the Malian public and the government opposed its presence.

In response, the population often expressed its disagreement in demonstrations. In front of the UN base in Gao

on January 27, 2015, a crowd formed to oppose MINUSMA's plan to establish a buffer zone in Tabankort, in the northeast. According to them, this initiative would harm the armed self-defense groups fighting the rebels in the region (BBC Africa, 2015). Protestors had obtained a document allegedly originating from MINUSMA detailing a planned "security zone" aiming to stop ongoing clashes between the CMA and the pro-government "Platform", both signatories to the Agreement (L'Essor, 2015).

The fragmentation of signatory armed groups further undermined the legitimacy of the agreement. Desperate to save the faltering peace process, in 2018 the UN resorted to a "Pact for Peace" that called for expanded inclusivity, accelerated decentralization, and international pressure. In the accompanying Resolution 2432, the UN expressed deep frustration at the delay in implementing the Agreement despite international support (Dicko, 2018).

Furthermore, key processes such as Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and the creation of interim authorities in the north of the country were virtually impossible due to the CMA's demands for autonomy, the government's centralizing vision, and community militias demanding that socio-economic grievances surrounding land and political representation be addressed (Lebovich, 2017). In 2017, only 1,500 of the 30,000 combatants targeted had been disarmed, according to the 2017 MINUSMA report.

Distrust between the stakeholders only grew with the 2020 coup d'état and 2021 assassination of a key CMA leader, Ould Sidat, in Bamako. With the assassination of Sidat, rebel signatories were unable to trust that MINUSMA or the international community to protect them and were unable to trust that the government was committed to the agreement. A resurgence in terrorist attacks that same year was perceived by the population as consequence of the peace process breaking down.

Such violence reinforced the popular perception of the Agreement as out of touch with the political reality. Some civil society actors organized themselves against the agreement, including the aptly named "Front de refus de l'Accord d'Alger" (Front for the Rejection of the Algiers Agreement). This group publicly called for the agreement to be abandoned and repeatedly organized rallies in Bamako.

MINUSMA's mandate was to help Mali address several interconnected challenges: restoring territorial sovereignty, securing the country, and protecting civilian populations. However, these objectives, particularly the first two, would never be achieved. Kidal remained under

the control of armed groups, given that Operation Serval had prevented the Malian army from entering Kidal during the liberation of the cities of Gao and Timbuktu, and that the MNLA had only resettled in Kidal after these events.

The security crisis spread from the north to the center of the country, marked by atrocious massacres in Ogossagou, Sobane-Da, and elsewhere (Sogodogo, 2024). Despite the presence of the UN forces, repeated terrorist attacks heightened a deep sense of abandonment and injustice among the civilian populations.

It is in this context that activist Siriki Kouyaté, demonstrating against MINUSMA in April 2023, told a journalist, "The entire population is mobilized, from Kayes to Kidal, to demand the departure of MINUSMA. It is a presence that perpetuates war, institutionalizes war, legalizes war. And MINUSMA is no longer credible. The head of the UN, Antonio Guterres, has stated that MINUSMA is not better equipped to deal with the terrorist threat" (Kane, 2023). On this occasion, Jeamille Bittar, a political leader of the M5-RFP opposition, said: "We believe that UN missions around the world have shown their limitations, particularly in Mali (...). I believe that they came to help us, and we no longer want this help. This help is not suited to the needs expressed by the population" (Kane, 2023).

MINUSMA's status as a neutral force never corresponded to the wishes of the Malian authorities. From the outset, key figures such as Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop, President IBK, and various special representatives of the UN Secretary-General have emphasized, at each renewal of the mandate, the need for a more "robust" mission that could contribute to counterterrorism. Nigerien President Mahamadou Issoufou stated in January 2018 that MINUSMA, with its mandate as an interposition force, could not restore state authority throughout Malian territory, arguing for a military force with the means to wage war against terrorist groups (Koba, 2018).

In a continuation of this plea, the transitional government also unsuccessfully requested a change to the mandate. It was in this vein that Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maïga told the United Nations General Assembly: "We should also, and above all, put back on the table the request for a more robust mandate and a change in MINUSMA's posture, which our government has regularly made to the UN Security Council" (Maïga, 2021). These various factors explain why 92% of those surveyed in a Mali-Mètre opinion poll were in favor of MINUSMA's departure (Mali-Mètre, 2024).

Instrumentalizing MINUSMA

Some armed groups that signed the 2015 Peace Agreement, notably the CMA, were in favor of the UN mission. MINUSMA's protection allowed them to maintain control over the areas they occupied, profit from smuggling networks, and gain international political legitimacy (Interview, Timbuktu). However, jihadist groups were hostile to the presence of UN forces, who they frequently attacked (UN, 2017, 2022) both physically and through hostile political rhetoric (David, 2023).

The CMA coalition, dominated by Iyad Ag Aghali, used MINUSMA to strengthen its credibility on the international stage. By participating in the mechanisms of the Algiers Agreement (2015) under UN supervision, the CMA has gained *de facto* legitimacy, since its inclusion in the peace talks has given it “partner” status in the eyes of the UN, despite its past involvement in abuses, notably the Aguelhok massacre in 2012 and the capture of Kidal in 2014. MINUSMA was also seen by this group as a means of accessing resources. In this sense, the CMA negotiated positions within the “interim authorities” of the north, financed by international funds transiting via MINUSMA.

Similarly, MINUSMA's presence in the Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu regions has indirectly enabled the CMA to consolidate its control by presenting itself as a “necessary interlocutor” for the UN. The CMA has marginalized rival militias, notably the pro-government GATIA. In areas under its influence, it has applied a form of local justice combining Sharia law and Tuareg traditions; this hybridization has been tolerated by the UN in the name of “stability.” In some respects, it has nevertheless strengthened the CMA's territorial control.

On the other hand, under the presidency of IBK (2013–2020), the government used MINUSMA to reinforce a unitary discourse, rejecting the CMA's demands for federalism or regionalism. The UN mission served as a foil in nationalist rhetoric. Some political leaders galvanized patriotic sentiment by accusing the CMA of collaborating with the UN to “divide Mali.” For example, in 2018, IBK refused to implement the “Law on Local Authorities,” arguing that MINUSMA supported a “separatist agenda” (Interview, Bamako).

After the 2020 coup, the new government continued to propagate an anti-MINUSMA narrative that portrayed the UN mission as a “neocolonial vestige” standing in the way of Mali's drive to assert national sovereignty

(Interview, Bamako). In line with this trend, Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop called for the withdrawal of MINUSMA in June 2023, describing it as a “source of division.”

In short, MINUSMA's loss of credibility has become a useful scapegoat for all actors: armed groups accused it of bias, the government of laxity, and the civilian population of failing to protect them from jihadist attacks.

Conclusion

Although the UN mission in Mali (2013–2023) has achieved notable successes in supporting elections and the provision of humanitarian aid, the security and political context in which it was deployed required an offensive mandate to support the central government in restoring its authority over the entire national territory.

One of the major challenges to peace in Mali lies in the subjugation of independence groups by JNIM terrorist jihadists. While the UN intended to intervene between the Malian army and the secessionists, the latter have allied themselves with the jihadists, making them the sole rulers of the northern regions. However, the jihadists were not really included in the peace dialogue process, either in the Ouagadougou Preliminary Agreement or in the agreement negotiated in Algiers in 2015. As a result, the 2015 agreement, which should have served as a basis for political dialogue and national reconciliation, was ineffective. The agreement didn't include the representatives from majority populations in the north who oppose the secessionists, including the Songhai and Fulani communities.

Furthermore, the divergent and often antagonistic interests of local actors, including the government and armed groups, made it difficult to build a unified vision for national reconciliation. This lack of a genuine national consensus eroded the peace process and fatally undermined MINUSMA's stabilization efforts.

Throughout the deployment, the mission was perceived and exploited in different ways by local actors, becoming a lever for political legitimacy as well as a symbol of the contradictions of international governance. Ultimately, MINUSMA's failures led to its villainization by Malian domestic politics, and it paid the price. In June of 2023, the transitional authorities ordered MINUSMA to leave.

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SAMIDRC: A Mission Unprepared

Stephanie Wolters

SADC's short-lived deployment of the Southern African Mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC) to eastern DRC in 2024-2025 had far-reaching negative political consequences for the regional body, the troop contributing countries (TCCs) of Tanzania, South Africa, and Malawi, and for regional peacekeeping efforts across Africa. This paper traces the history of the deployment and identifies three key factors that undermined the mission's success.

First, SADC underestimated the motivation and strength of its opponent. The Mouvement du 23 Mars (M23) rebel group and its backers, the Rwandan Defense Forces (RDF), proved to be a capable and determined combined force of over 8,000. Second, SAMIDRC was militarily ill-equipped to defend itself against a peer threat, let alone take back territory from the M23. This material weakness ultimately led to defeat and withdrawal without completing the mandate. The final factor was domestic political rejection of the mission in South Africa, the lead troop contributor to SAMIDRC. The South African government did not anticipate the negative public reaction to the cost and casualties incurred by the SANDF deployment to the DRC. Strong criticism by opposition parties and the reality of coalition government significantly reduced the ruling party's ability to make unilateral decisions about military deployments abroad.

Resurgence of the M23 and failure of the EACRF

In late 2021, the M23 rebel group re-emerged in eastern DRC. Backed by Rwanda, it began to take ever more territory in North Kivu province over the course of 2021-2022. The Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC), the Congolese national army, quickly demonstrated its inability to defend the country's borders or protect its civilian population, while the reconstituted M23 proved a substantially stronger military force than during the previous crisis in 2012-2013. The existing United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), admitted in 2022 that it could not

match M23 on the battlefield, saying the M23's military capacity was closer to that of a national army than an armed group (Masheer 2022).

To mitigate its military's weakness, the DRC government assembled a mixed bag of existing Congolese armed groups united by their opposition to the M23. This alliance of armed groups, known as the Wazalendo, became a formal adjunct force to the FARDC. However, the Wazalendo was unable to match the M23 and RDF, and the FARDC continued to lose more and more territory (UNSC, 2023).

The Congolese government then turned to regional military forces for aid, first approaching the East Africa Community (EAC) in mid-2022. Composed of troops from Kenya, Uganda and Burundi, the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF)'s deployment was driven largely by the Kenyan government. Kenya's elite sought to make economic inroads into the DRC, building on the close personal relationship between the outgoing Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta and Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi. The personal connection between the two heads of state dates back to the strong friendship between Kenyatta and Tshisekedi's father, and played a significant role in the DRC's decision to join the EAC just months after Tshisekedi came to power in 2019. This strong connection, as well as Kenyan economic ambitions in the DRC, explain Kenya's headlong rush to get involved in the crisis. In addition to the EACRF deployment, the EAC also supported a political component, the "Nairobi Process," that aimed to bring all armed groups in the eastern DRC together to discuss disarmament. The Congolese government excluded the M23 from the talks from day one due to their ongoing military offensive. The continued fighting undermined the will to disarm, leaving the Nairobi process out of step with reality on the ground.

EACRF troops deployed to eastern DRC in late 2022, but less than six months later, the Congolese government fell out with EAC member states over the exact nature of the force's mandate. Kinshasa argued the EACRF should actively go after the M23, while the EAC argued

that its troops were there to safeguard areas that had been recaptured by the Congolese army. In addition, Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi was unhappy that the EAC remained unwilling to point the finger at Rwanda over its support to the M23. As a result, the Congolese government asked EACRF to leave and turned to SADC to fill the gap.

Underestimating the opponent

At this stage, Tshisekedi and his SADC allies that he approached for help, felt that a military solution was an achievable outcome for a combined FARDC-SADC force. Whether SADC's assessment of its capacities was based on the relative ease with which it was able to neutralise the M23 in 2013 is unclear, but what is clear is that they over-estimated the strength and commitment of their forces and underestimated those of the M23 and Rwandan. This underestimation was the groundwork for SAMIDRC's humiliating defeat and withdrawal in 2025.

Tshisekedi's pivot to southern Africa was somewhat unexpected, as he had largely ignored the region during his first years as president. Lobbying SADC and South Africa, Tshisekedi successfully made the case that the DRC needed military support. Tshisekedi's motivations were fairly clear – it was an election year, and he had built his election campaign around restoring peace in eastern DRC. To fulfil that promise, he needed a military force that would act aggressively against the M23. Kicking out the unpopular EACRF and bringing in a SADC force were important political victories for Tshisekedi (Wolters, 2024). However, SADC's decision to agree to deploy came as a surprise. SADC was relatively hands-off throughout the first 3 years of the conflict and few expected it to step into the breach opened by EACRF's departure.

The official line from South African officials was that the deployment to the DRC was necessary under SADC's Mutual Defense Pact, which requires the body to come to the defence of a member state if attacked. Many were sceptical that this was the full story – not least because the SADC engagement started three years into the conflict, but also because the ANC's history of corruption scandals and the DRC's vast mineral wealth raised suspicions that illicit financial interests might be underpinning the decision.

There were also immaterial motives at play. SADC and South Africa long considered the DRC to be part of its sphere of influence, and have a long history of diplomatic and military engagement going back to the 1998

war. When the first M23 crisis erupted in 2012, Tanzania, Malawi and South Africa – who would all later contribute forces to SAMIDRC – fielded the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB). The FIB was an offensive military intervention under UN leadership and financing. In the 2012-2013 crisis, Rwanda came under swift and significant international diplomatic pressure to stop supporting the M23. By the time the FIB was deployed, Rwanda had complied with international demands to cut military ties. As a result, the FIB were able to relatively easily defeat the weakened armed group. The FIB remained deployed in the DRC with a mandate to neutralise Congolese and foreign armed groups alongside MONUSCO and the FARDC. Unfortunately, FIB operations have only achieved limited successes since.

The nature of the SAMIDRC deployment in 2023 is substantially different from that of the FIB in 2013 in four crucial ways. First, the troop contributing countries and the DRC, not the UN, bore the costs of the SAMIDRC deployment, estimated to be USD 500 million per year. Second, SAMIDRC is not part of a neutral UN peacekeeping mission, but rather a stand-alone regional peace enforcement force deployed to protect a member state. Third, international pressure on Rwanda to end its support to the M23 and to withdraw RDF troops was slow to gain momentum and by 2025, had no impact on Rwanda's involvement. Although Rwanda's role has been established since 2022 by the UN and numerous other international organisations, as well as the intelligence agencies of several countries, Kigali denies its support to the M23 as well as the presence of its troops in eastern DRC. Rwandan military, financial and logistical support to the M23 remains unchanged, and the rebellion's military strength is intact. Finally, by the time SAMIDRC deployed in late 2023, the conflict had been raging since 2021. The conflict in was of a different order of magnitude than it was in 2012-2013.

SADC's inability to recognize the threat they faced was the first of three factors that would doom the SAMIDRC. This first factor's immediate consequence, however, was the second factor – an underequipped force.

Deploying underequipped and unprepared

As a result of SADC's underestimation of the situation, the mission deployed were not ready for the enemy they encountered. It was clear from the outset that the SADC force could not match their opponent. During the first year of its deployment, SAMIDRC proved unable to make a difference on the battlefield. According to the UN Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of

Congo, the M23/RDF expanded its territorial control by 30% between April and Dec 2024, while SAMIDRC troops remained stationed in their headquarters at Sake, some 30 kms west of the provincial capital of Goma (UNSC, 2024). By January 2025, 70% of North Kivu province was under the control of the M23 and the RDF. SAMIDRC faced a number of significant operational challenges. The mission was supposed to have a capacity of 5,000 troops, but never reached its full troop strength. In addition, the deployment was never fully funded and it lacked air support. Long before the M23's January 2025 military campaign, South African defence analysts warned that SADC could not support such a deployment, and that the lack of training, preparedness and equipment was putting South African soldiers in harm's way. Darren Olivier, the director of the African Defence Review said: "SAMIDRC was set up for failure from the start, without organic air support, without sufficient numbers, and without a Plan B for what to do should M23 and Rwandan forces break through FARDC lines. It was not designed to fight independently" (defenceWeb, 2025b). In order to achieve its mandate, Defence analyst Darren Wigin says that SAMIDRC would have required "a brigade plus force with maritime, air and artillery support capabilities, logistical support (road transport, repair & recovery capabilities, casualties evacuation, intelligence acquisition and Quick Reaction Force in support of the DRC."

In addition, the Congolese army, one of the most corrupt and weak on the continent, was an unreliable partner. Many FARDC commanders have links to various armed groups, or are involved in the illicit minerals trade, while FARDC troops are notorious for committing human rights violations (UNSC, 2024; UN HCHR, 2025). As the M23 advanced on SAMIDRC headquarters and towards Goma in January 2025, many FARDC soldiers simply fled. SADC and South Africa, with 13 years of on-the-ground experience in the DRC, should have been aware of the significant challenges involved in working with the Congolese army.

SAMIDRC's offensive mandate was clear and SADC understood Rwanda's role in supporting the M23, and that the Rwandan Defence Force (RDF) were directly involved. SADC openly recognising the role played by Rwanda provided the DRC with significant diplomatic support at a time when many states, and the AU, were reluctant to speak plainly about Rwanda's involvement. SADC's vocal position and Rwanda's non-member status meant that the deployment of SAMIDRC was bad news for Rwandan President Paul Kagame. Kagame knew that he could not influence SADC in the way he had been able to influence the EAC, who were reluctant to go up against a member state militarily or politically. From the outset, he did everything he could to undermine SAMIDRC's deployment. In early 2024, weeks after the SA-

MIDRC deployment had begun, Rwanda lobbied the United Nations Security Council to vote against providing logistical support to SAMIDRC. It also lobbied the African Union Peace and Security Council to prevent it from endorsing the force. It failed on both counts: the AU endorsed the force and the UNSC voted in favour of limited logistical support to SAMIDRC through its existing DRC peacekeeping mission. Both of those decisions paved the way for an eventual logistical and financial reinforcement of SAMIDRC. When the political approach failed, Rwanda took direct action. Both the M23 and the RDF targeted SAMIDRC, and South African troops in particular. SAMIDRC troops repeatedly came under heavy enemy fire from M23 and Rwandan forces across the border (Fabricius, 2024).

Kagame did not hide his ire with South Africa. In an interview in April 2024 with the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), the state broadcaster, he stated clearly that he did not think SADC or South Africa had any place being in eastern DRC and criticised the deployment (Mokoena, 2024).

Defeated by domestic politics

Kagame is an exceptionally shrewd political mind, and he adeptly anticipated that the ruling ANC would struggle to explain casualties to a public already sceptical of South Africa's hefty financial investment in a far-way mission. By targeting SAMIDRC troops, he shone a spotlight on the deployment, and on the poor state of the South African National Defence force (SANDF). Ultimately, it was in the South African domestic political arena where SADC would be decisively defeated.

In January 2025, the M23 and the RDF overran the SAMIDRC base at Sake, capturing Goma the next day, killing 13 SANDF soldiers in the process. In the weeks following the battle, Ramaphosa continued to defend the deployment, arguing that this was the nature of peacekeeping efforts and made the case for South Africa's role on the grounds that: "The territorial integrity of the DRC must be respected in accordance with the United Nations Charter on the respect of sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of other states. The presence of the SAMIDRC forces demonstrates a commitment of SADC member states to supporting the DRC in its efforts to achieve lasting peace and stability" (Republic of South Africa, The Presidency, 2024).

But one debacle followed another. With the airport in Goma closed and under M23 control, SAMIDRC troops positioned at Goma airport hoping for help from their countries, became de facto prisoners of the M23 and the

RDF for 48 days without any logistical support from South Africa (defenseWeb, 2025a). While it took 31 days to repatriate injured soldiers, the bodies of the dead soldiers could not be flown home until early March, after the South African government had negotiated their passage via Rwanda. It was a deeply humiliating situation, and a politically costly one for Ramaphosa. Public outrage over the deployment, and criticisms that the SANDF had been sent into a volatile situation without the means to defend themselves reached a fever pitch. It seems this public attention took Ramaphosa by surprise – previous foreign deployments had not met with the same level of public scrutiny. But times had changed – the ANC lost the majority in 2024 and was governing in a coalition, while public distrust of the ANC and its representatives had never been higher.

And so, Ramaphosa and the South African government buckled, putting an abrupt end to the deployment in mid-March 2025. Astonishingly, Ramaphosa suggested that an imminent resolution of the conflict justified SAMIDRC's withdrawal, grossly misrepresenting the situation on the ground: "the decision to finally withdraw from the eastern DRC by the three troop contributing countries is also based on the fact that the ceasefire that we have sought to install in that place is now being embraced" (defenseWeb, 2025a).

In fact, nothing could have been further from the truth: the situation in eastern DRC in March 2025 was substantially worse than it was when SAMIDRC deployed in late-2023. Before it deployed, the Congolese government controlled the provincial capitals of Goma and Bukavu, cities now held by the M23. The ceasefire that Ramaphosa cites, was also not in place when the decision to withdraw SAMIDRC was made – the first US-Qatar brokered ceasefire only came into effect in July 2025, and did not last more than several days.

In late-January, the EAC and SADC held a joint summit at which they decided to work together to resolve the crisis. The two proposed a number of initiatives, such as the merger of regional and domestic negotiations between armed groups, and the deployment of a joint military force composed of SADC and EAC troops. Whether the latter will ever happen is unclear, but the fact that SADC has agreed to it means that it flip-flopped completely – from being an ally of the DRC government

fighting against the M23 and the RDF to being a passive player willing to align itself with the views and approaches of the EAC. The EAC, of which Rwanda is a member state, is unlikely to come out openly against Rwanda's support to the M23. Kinshasa lost its most significant African ally, while Rwanda can count on the EAC to block any initiatives critical of its actions.

It would take until early July 2025 to bring the majority of the SANDF soldiers deployed to eastern DRC back to South Africa (defenseWeb, 2025c). The damage to South Africa's and SADC's standing as an actor in African peacekeeping is significant: It pledged support to a SADC member state on the basis of principles, invested public resources and South African lives in the operation, but was ultimately incapable of providing what it promised. When its incapacity was exposed, it buckled under domestic pressure, abandoned all principles and withdrew its support, playing into the hands of Rwanda. In an attempt to save face, South Africa and SADC misrepresented the withdrawal as the natural evolution of the conflict towards a negotiated political settlement. As of the time of writing in late-2025, such an agreement remains a fiction. It will not be easy to come back from such a wholesale failure.

Conclusion

The parties involved in the SAMIDRC deployment, the Congolese host government, SADC, and the troop contributing countries, were all guilty of short-term thinking. The DRC government wanted a rapid resolution, ignoring the weaknesses of its own army, while SADC too rushed in, forgetting to assess the strength of the enemy, the drivers of the conflict, and its own capacity to achieve the mandate. As a result of this knee-jerk deployment, the reputation of SADC peacekeeping was damaged at the cost of wasted funds and human lives. Critically, the conflict also remains unresolved. In assessing future deployment, SADC and South Africa must first carefully analyse proposed responses and ensure that any effort is properly resourced. Populations living in conflict zones, and the taxpayers of troop contributing countries should not pay the price for poorly-designed and executed military forays.

Mapping the Debacle: The Failure to Coordinate Goma's many Defenders

Fred Bauma

On January 28, after a year-long siege and following more than a week of fighting, the M23 finally entered the provincial capital of Goma (UNSC, 2025). The city fell despite two international peace operations, the Congolese army, Romanian mercenaries, and partisan militia defending the city. The capture of Goma and the South Kivu capital Bukavu within weeks marked an important milestone in the escalation of violence that has ravaged eastern DRC. This offensive is the largest territorial advance by any armed group since the end of the Second Congo War in 2002. 700,000 people were displaced in North Kivu. This paper attempts to explain why the various forces fighting (or claiming to be fighting) in and around the city of Goma were unable to prevent the M23 offensive and its historic expansion. Based on a review of the literature and a dozen interviews with key actors, this paper concludes that the ineffectiveness of the forces fighting alongside the Congolese government was the result of a glaring lack of coordination at all levels. This lack of coordination was the result of a series of strategic choices by the Congolese government and its allies, namely the quality of the troops, the quality of the command, and the lack of preparedness. While there were other factors that contributed to the escalation, such as the failure of the Luanda process and the timing of the US presidential transition, this lack of coordination among the defenders made M23's military conquest possible.

In November 2012, when the previous M23 rebellion occupied the city of Goma, it provoked strong international outrage and led to the suspension of aid to Rwanda by many countries, including Germany, France, and the US (Radio Okapi, 2012). Most significantly, outrage over Goma's fall led to the creation of a peacekeeping first, the *Force Intervention Brigade* (FIB) an offensive UN force composed of troops from Southern African states to eradicate armed groups, starting with the M23 (UNSC 2023). The capture of Goma in 2012, although an important victory for the M23, marked the beginning of its defeat a year later. Cut off from Rwandan support and hounded from the air by FIB gunships, the M23 movement turned on itself and crumbled.

Twelve years later, the city of Goma remains a strategic location. A humanitarian and economic hub, Goma had become an important military center and the seat of several consular offices (including South Africa, Uganda, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Kenya). A fortress, therefore, but also a potential target. Despite the resurgence of the M23 in 2021, the feeling that "Goma will never fall" was strong (BBC Afrique, 2025). For many analysts and diplomats, the lesson of 2012 was that "it was not in the M23's interest to take the city of Goma" and that the following international backlash would be counterproductive for the rebel movement.

The Congolese government was counting on the concentration of military force to protect the city and prepared to retaliate "at the slightest skirmish" against Rwanda, M23's patron (Top Congo, 2025). Since the resurgence of the M23 in 2021, the Congolese government tripled its military spending and invested those resources in heavy weapons based in Goma and Bukavu (Agence Ecofin, 2024). In addition to weapons, the Congolese army (FARDC) in Goma was bolstered by a large assortment of allies. In addition to various partisan militia known as "Wazalendo" (patriots), the Congolese contracted two private military companies (Agemira and Congo Protection) and brought in the allied Burundian army. The UN peacekeeping mission MONUSCO also committed to defending the city. In December 2023, MONUSCO launched the defensive "Operation Springbok" that aimed to keep the Rwandan army and the M23 away from the city of Goma and outside the town of Sake. Finally, the Southern Africa Development Community regional (SADC) regional block deployed a military mission (SAMIDRC) to defend the city (SADC 2023). And yet, not only did Goma fall under the control of the M23, but so did Bukavu, Walikale, and many other towns across North and South Kivu. The expansion of the rebellion in the rich Beni-Lubero region of North Kivu was only halted by the presence of Ugandan army units (UPDF) deployed as part of counter-terrorism operations against the Islamic State (Tazama RDC, 2025). This was an unprecedented escalation of violence and a failure for all the forces present in Goma.

This paper consists of three parts. First, it provides a chronicle of the capture of the city of Goma. Next, it assesses the actions each of the forces present and, finally, it questions the effectiveness of the coordination mechanisms put in place, including the Joint Operations Coordination Center (CCCCO).

The slow fall of Goma

The final assault on Goma took less than a week, but the larger battle for the city took place in several stages. These stages are important for understanding how a force estimated at 11,000 combatants was able to defeat several armies deployed on the ground. The pressure on the city of Goma began almost a year before the city's fall. In February 2024, M23 attacked the town of Sake, 27 km west of Goma (Le Monde Afrique, 2025). The M23 temporarily occupied the town before withdrawing to the surrounding area under international pressure. This attack drove mass displacement from the surrounding towns into displacement camps in Goma, where they would remain until the camps were dismantled by the M23 after victory (HRW, 2025a). Until then, Sake, an "essential bulwark in the defense of Goma," would remain a ghost town. Armed groups allied with the government, labeled "Wazalendo" (patriots), occupied Sake with the Congolese army, under the helpless gaze of SAMIRDC and MONUSCO forces (Jeune Afrique, 2025b). The M23 withdrew to the hills surrounding Sake and controlled all supply routes to the city of Goma, bringing the city under siege. This year-long stalemate was sporadically interrupted by attacks by Wazalendo militiamen and retaliation by the M23, endangering displaced persons in the Mugunga and Lushagala camps (HRW, 2024). Humanitarian organizations regularly deplored these attacks, which violate international humanitarian law and cause dozens of casualties. Goma was also troubled by the sudden presence of several thousand Wazalendo and various battalions of the Congolese army now all living in the city. In the city, as in the camps, insecurity was rampant. The population grew weary of the rebels, the Congolese military, and their local supporters (Radio Okapi, 2024a).

Meanwhile, the Luanda peace process struggled to move forward. Representatives of the Congolese and Rwandan governments agreed on operations against the FDLR and the withdrawal of Rwanda's "defense mechanisms" (RFI Afrique, 2024a). However, the M23, the main belligerent force, was not invited to the negotiations. Peace efforts collapsed after Rwanda boycotted the meeting scheduled for December 15, 2024, between Paul Kagame and Félix Tshisekedi (RFI Afrique, 2024b). The collapse of talks marked the beginning of the offensive that would capture the city.

Immediately after Rwanda snubbed Tshisekedi, the M23 launched a series of attacks against FARDC positions in Ngungu in Masisi and then in Minova, thereby controlling navigation on Lake Kivu (DW Afrique, 2025). On the 25th, the M23 launched a rapid attack on the city of Sake and on the 27th, began the assault on Goma. The Rwandan army intervened directly with ground troops and drones, attacking FARDC units in the northeast of the city along their shared border. This attack destabilized the FARDC's defense (UNSC 2025).

M23 and Rwanda were capable and ready forces. However, difficulties in coordination between the Congolese army, MONUSCO, SAMIRDC, and other forces present, a lack of will and capacity to fight, and poor combat readiness are all factors that explain the fall of Goma and the debacle of the FARDC and all the forces present. The difficulties in coordinating forces around the city of Goma are linked to the nature of the forces involved. At least seven different forces were operating around the city in the months leading up to its fall. These different forces lacked internal and inter-force coherence. Furthermore, the composite nature of some of the Congolese army's allies made effective coordination nearly impossible.

The government coalition: Divided armies, divergent interests

The Congolese army was one of the weak links in the defense of Goma. Effectively a composite army, its structural weaknesses give rise to conflicting structures and interests that make coordination difficult. Like many armies, the Congolese army operates based on shared principles of "unity of command, continuity and permanence, simplicity... responsiveness and flexibility. These principles aim to strengthen the coherence and effectiveness of the army's actions. Unfortunately, the basic structure of the Congolese army inhibits unity of command.

The army splits training and implementation structures, resulting in parallel chains of command. General officers responsible for training report to the force headquarters alongside implementation officers who report to the defense zone commander. This is a recipe for conflict rather than collaboration. The "state of siege" since 2021 that placed military governors in charge of North Kivu and Ituri added another layer of confusion. Relations between the chief of staff of the *forces terrestres*, General Fall Sikabwe, and the military governor, General Chirimwami, were tense, as were relations between Chirimwami and operational commanders.

In the months leading up to the fall of Goma, the Congolese army command was in complete disarray. The city was defended by a dozen general officers with hostile relationships and divergent interests, each responsible for a different axis of the city. Also present was the Republican Guard units, who acted as an army within the army, reporting directly to the President of the Republic and not the normal chain of command. Other army units were notable for their blatant lack of discipline and regular abuses (Congo Virtual Info, 2025). One unit, Satan II, was notorious for regular abuses against the civilian population.

Various Wazalendo factions, began to operate openly in Goma, sometimes in civilian clothing (Juene Afrique, 2024). Regular tensions between these different militia groups and Congolese army officers reinforced the impression of a complete lack of control by the Congolese security forces (Congo Rasure, 2024). This further undermined trust between the population and the security forces. The assassination of the military governor a few days before the capture of Goma and the change of army commander in the middle of operations further hurt any coherence in the army's command structure (Juene Afrique, 2025c). The death of General Chirimwami, who influenced the Wazalendo militiamen, further destabilized this diverse coalition fighting alongside the FARDC.

An ill-prepared, underfunded, and poorly equipped SAMIDRC

Alongside the FARDC, the Southern African Development Community Mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC) also experienced major political and logistical difficulties. Deployed after the withdrawal of EAC forces in December 2023, SAMIRDC was an offensive mission with some initial legitimacy granted by the positive memory of FIB in 2013. As in 2012-13, South Africa played an important leadership role in the new force, even though its military capabilities were greatly reduced in the intervening years. SAMIDRC relied on logistical support from MONUSCO. According to South African diplomatic sources, SAMIRDC could not take the initiative in offensives against the M23 as long as the Luanda process ceasefire was in place (since July-August 2024). Its deployment was therefore reduced to a defensive posture around Goma.

During the assault on Goma, the FARDC and Burundian military abandoned their defensive lines near Sake, lea-

ving the South African National Defense Force (SANDF) exposed and forced to fight. Coordination within SAMIRDC was also problematic, with Tanzanian troops choosing not to fight, according to sources within the force. The SANDF of SAMIRDC would end up relying on the intervention of other South African troops from MONUSCO. During the battle, 14 South African soldiers and three Malawian soldiers were killed.

Soon after, Malawi announced the withdrawal of its troops from the DRC. The presence of the Southern African mission delayed the capture of Goma but could not protect the city in the long term. Failures in collaboration with the FARDC and MONUSCO, logistical difficulties, and political constraints rendered it ineffective in the face of direct attack by the M23 and the Rwandan army. On March 13, following an extraordinary meeting held in Zimbabwe, SADC announced the end of its mission and the withdrawal of its forces.

MONUSCO: The Absent power

MONUSCO remained in the background in the response to the M23. In recent years, the mission was subject to popular protests against its alleged inaction. Since August of 2020, the UN mission had a mandate to support the Congolese army and the Southern African mission with logistics and intelligence (MONUSCO, 2024). Earlier, in November 2023, MONUSCO launched Operation Springbok to protect the cities of Goma and Sake from M23 attacks. MONUSCO set up defensive positions around in Goma and Sake (Radio Okapi, 2024). However, several issues prevented the UN mission from being effective. Beyond the coordination problems, MONUSCO suffered from inconsistencies in its mandate, the level of preparedness of its troops, and significant logistical and operational difficulties. These operational challenges included difficulty in supplying food to certain contingents and problems with coordinating fire support during clashes, particularly in Mubambiro. In April 2024, the Indian contingent occupying advanced positions around Sake unilateral withdrew, angering FARDC (Election-net, 2024). The Indian contingents cited the risk of coming under friendly fire. This example illustrates the difficulties of coordinating forces in this context, despite efforts to do so. Furthermore, the offensive mandate and support for the army—both requested by Congolese civil society—increased MONUSCO's vulnerability by making it a party to the conflict.

Coordination challenges

The fall of the city was in large part due to the inability of the various forces to coordinate, despite their efforts to do so. Since February 2022, MONUSCO and the Congolese army shared a *Command Control Coordination Office* (CCCO) (UN Peacekeeping, 2025). Located within Goma airport, this space served to facilitate the pooling of forces and the alignment of objectives between MONUSCO and the Congolese army. After remaining inoperative for a long time, this center played an important role in coordinating operations in the months leading up to the capture of Goma. Several high-ranking Congolese army officers in the city took part (notably the chief of staff of the ground forces, the commander of the military region, and the military governor). According to some sources, Burundian military and MONUSCO officials also met in the CCCO.

Several factors made coordination between the various forces difficult in practice. These factors contributed to the ineffectiveness of the peace support missions, despite their robust mandates. These include:

- *Incompatible mandates:* Although MONUSCO was mandated to support the Congolese army and the Southern African Development Community mission in the fight against the M23, this mandate did not extend to forces fighting alongside the FARDC. Some support may even have been contrary to its mandate or international law. For example, MONUSCO could not support armed groups that it was mandated to disarm. Nor could the UN mission support private military companies or Burundian soldiers. Yet these three types of forces were part of the Congolese army's apparatus. Members of some of these groups, particularly certain Wazalendo leaders, are under UN sanctions.
- *Overlapping troop compositions:* Some countries contributing troops to MONUSCO also had troops in the DRC under other mandates. South Africa and Tanzania were part of SAMIRDC and had troops in MONUSCO's rapid response units, both stationed in the same area. During the battle, some units came to the aid of their compatriots under enemy fire, operating outside of the mission command structure.
- *The "questionable will to fight"* on the part of elements of the Congolese army and certain MONUSCO

contingents. Both MONUSCO and officials from SAMIDRC contributing countries, notably South Africa, assert that their mandate was to support the Congolese army and this support was ineffective when the Congolese army did not fight. Yet, both within MONUSCO and SAMIDRC, not all contingents had the will to engage in combat.

- *The multiplicity of commanders* within the Congolese army and the tensions between them made it difficult to coordinate efforts. This hampered the army's effectiveness and rendered the support that the army could receive less effective. Added to this were other issues, particularly the poor living conditions of the soldiers and the lack of discipline.
- Finally, the *multitude of armed forces* present came with frequent shifts in alliances. Both Wazalendo militiamen and FARDC officers changed sides before the offensives. This undermined trust between different groups and made it difficult to share intelligence. According to UN sources, the M23 had access to the Springbok III operational plan. "People flip sides all the time. Half of M23 are former FARDC."

Conclusion

The fall of the city of Goma to the M23 was a turning point in the ongoing conflict that started in 2021. This defeat follows the failure of negotiations in Angola between the Congolese government and Rwanda. It is a bitter failure, not only for the Congolese government, but for all the forces involved.

This paper focuses on the issue of force coordination. It shows that the slow fall of Goma was the result of a lack of effective internal coordination among the various forces allied with the Congolese government, despite efforts to improve it. This challenge was compounded by incompatible mandates, multiple chains of command, troop indiscipline, and poor preparation. Furthermore, the willingness of certain troops within the FARDC, MONUSCO, and SAMIDRC to fight was questionable. As the crisis continues to drag on and the new peace processes underway in Doha and Washington show their limitations, it is important to learn lessons from the debacle in Goma.

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Local Perceptions, National Politics, and Regional Dynamics of Military Intervention in Mozambique

Egna Sidumo

Since October 2017, Mozambique's resource-rich northern province of Cabo Delgado has been the epicentre of a terrorist insurgency that has posed both a significant local threat and a risk to broader regional security. The government initially hired private military companies (PMCs) to try and stem the violence. When those interventions failed, the authorities turned to Rwanda and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) for military support. This chapter explores the legitimacy of state-sanctioned peace support operations through an analysis of the interaction between local perceptions, and national political preferences.

The interventions by Rwanda and SADC in 2021 reflected divergent approaches within Maputo's political elite over dealing with the insurgency of the Islamic State-linked Ahlu Sunna Wal-jama (ASWJ). There seemed to be a clear preference for intervention by the Rwandan Defence Forces (RDF) under a bilateral agreement. While the deployment of the first RDF contingent of roughly 1,000 troops was rapidly implemented, SADC's planned intervention faced delays and disputes that affected its legitimacy – both in the eyes of the authorities, and the communities in which it operated. Existing analysis tends to interpret the Mozambican government's hesitancy over endorsing SADC's intervention as a function of state fragility or capacity constraints (ISS, 2021). In this view, the government's slow and cautious engagement with regional mechanisms reflected weak inter-ministerial coordination, a tradition of centralised decision-making, and limited confidence in SADC's ability to deliver an effective security response. Such interpretations emphasise institutional incapacity rather than the political and strategic calculations that shaped Mozambique's choice of partners.

However, this chapter argues that political control, not institutional weakness, was central to Maputo's calculus. By exploring the challenge of balancing localised needs, national priorities, and regional stability, it offers insights into the public legitimacy of external military engagements.

Turning to foreign intervention

ASWJ's insurgency in Cabo Delgado has led to widespread civilian displacement, loss of life, and economic stagnation. Mozambique's small, under-equipped, and poorly trained military struggled to stem the violence. In August 2020, ASWJ captured the port city of Mocimboa da Praia and made it their capital. In March 2021, they launched a coordinated, multi-pronged attack in a complex assault on Palma City, the gateway to Mozambique's offshore Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) deposits. The attack combined simultaneous strikes on military, economic, and civilian targets, demonstrating an unprecedented level of logistical coordination and strategic intent (Doctor, 2022).

In response, the French multinational TotalEnergies halted its \$20 billion LNG project, an investment regarded by Maputo as central to its future development plans. The humanitarian cost of the violence has also been enormous. By April 2021, ASWJ's killings and beheadings – especially of non-Muslim civilians – had forced more than 730,000 people to flee their homes (UNHCR, 2021). All told, more than 1.3 million people have been displaced since the conflict began (OCHA, 2024).

The government first turned for military support to the Russian PMC Wagner, then the South African-based Dyck Advisory Group (DAG). Both missions failed to stop ASWJ's advance and were wound up – amid reports of friction with the Mozambican armed forces. As alarm mounted, there were growing calls from within SADC for military intervention to restore peace and prevent any regional spillover of the insecurity. Yet the government looked to Rwanda; an East African country with which it previously had only limited diplomatic links, and certainly not the shared history, and economic integration that exists within the SADC region. Although the details of the agreement have not been made public, the RDF was primarily responsible for security around the gas projects

in Palma and Mocímboa da Praia districts, in alignment with the government's resource interests.

Maputo initially resisted pressure from within the region to sanction a SADC intervention (Amani Africa, 2023). At the time, President Felipe Nyusi publicly denied the existence of an organised insurgency, initially framing the violence as the work of criminals – a narrative that deflected attention from the socio-economic and political grievances that underpinned the insecurity. Accepting a SADC mission – particularly one with a multidimensional component – would have required acknowledging the conflict's root causes: a politically uncomfortable position for the ruling FRELIMO party which had already lost popularity over a number of scandals¹⁵. Instead, the government's preference was for bilateral arrangements. It first explored options with neighbouring Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, before reluctantly accepting the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), which arrived a few weeks after the RDF had deployed. The speed with which the agreement with Kigali was reached raised concerns over the deal's transparency – as well as the snub it delivered to SADC. The arrangement, however, may have stemmed from a desire to avoid the perceived loss of sovereignty associated with a high-profile regional mission (ISS, 2021).

The legitimacy of military interventions plays a crucial role in determining their long-term success and impact (Paris, 2004). Peace support operations, especially in the context of insurgencies, require a careful balance between securing the support of local communities, addressing national political interests, and aligning with regional and international frameworks. Without legitimacy rooted both in normative principles and in effective performance, interventions risk undermining their own objectives by alienating populations and deepening local grievances (Von Billerbeck, 2017). Political support is also vital for success. While SAMIM was not widely opposed by local communities, it faced bureaucratic and symbolic resistance from the national authorities – particularly in contrast to the more politically acceptable bilateral agreement with Rwanda. Aligning multiple levels of legitimacy – local, national, regional, and international – is especially challenging in today's fragmented global order (de Coning and Peter, 2019).

SAMIM deployed in July 2021 following the approval of an Extraordinary Summit of SADC Heads of State and Government a month earlier. It comprised troops from eight countries with the objectives of neutralising ASWJ, supporting the Mozambican security forces – including offering training and advice – and collaborating with hu-

manitarian and development agencies. What was planned as a force of 3,900 backed by air and naval assets turned out to be a far less robust deployment of 1,900 personnel (Mandrup, 2024), crucially with only a few of the envisaged helicopters that would have made it more mobile and faster to respond.

While Rwanda moved rapidly to secure the strategic districts of Palma and Mocímboa da Praia, SAMIM was sent to the more “peripheral” areas of Macomia, Quissanga, and Meluco reflecting both political caution and logistical limitations within the SADC mission (Chidzanja, 2025). The SADC intervention struggled to fulfil its mandate (ICG, 2021). One key issue was the lack of effective coordination between Mozambican forces and SAMIM units, which made joint planning and operations difficult. Fear of information leaks from within the Mozambican military also impacted sharing, while political interference reportedly sometimes blocked operations at the last minute (Chidzanja, 2024).

Local perceptions of legitimacy

Engagement with local communities is increasingly recognised as fundamental to the success of military interventions. Local communities not only play a critical role in providing tactical intelligence, but soft power “hearts and minds” is seen as a key ingredient to counter-insurgency operations. However, this engagement is contingent upon the perceived legitimacy of the mission, which can be defined as a “generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995).

Recent studies have shown that perceptions of legitimacy are not monolithic. Local perceptions of military interventions can vary significantly across different demographic groups, geographic areas, and over time (Tritthart, 2023). Therefore, understanding the legitimacy of the interventions in Cabo Delgado requires acknowledging that views from rural women, displaced communities, or youth may diverge sharply from those of political elites or urban populations. However, communities are more likely to support interventions when they view them as credible, inclusive, and aligned with their needs and aspirations. Without this local backing, even the most well-resourced operations risk alienating the very populations they aim to protect, thereby undermining their effectiveness and long-term impact.

¹⁵ The so-called “tuna bond scandal” tipped Mozambique into debt default and was particularly damaging.

Legitimacy can be understood as a subjective perception or attitude that can differ between various groups of actors (Sabrow, 2016). The standards by which actors assess whether an action is legitimate can be assessed from two perspectives: ideological and pragmatic. Ideological legitimacy focuses on the actor's legitimate authority to carry out the action and the intentions that shape it. In contrast, pragmatic legitimacy is concerned with the perceived results or outcomes of those actions.

When we analyse the simultaneous interventions of Rwandan and SADC forces, we can see they had contrasting legitimacies. While SADC's deployment enjoyed ideological legitimacy, it did not have full support on the ground among local communities – many of whom were frustrated by its slow deployment and operational hesitancy. The RDF, on the other hand, only gained its pragmatic legitimacy when it demonstrated its practical relevance with the recovery of towns and the protection of local communities.

This mirrors findings from UN peacekeeping operations: local populations tend to evaluate interventions based on whether the missions tangibly meet their security expectations rather than any appreciation of their mandates. When populations perceive a gap between the threats they face and an intervention's ability (or willingness) to address them, legitimacy is eroded (Trithart, 2023).

Generally, regional forces possess strong ideological legitimacy as host societies are likely to identify with the regional organisation concerned. There are also often broad cultural similarities, a shared history, as well as similar political and economic structures among members. However, in the Mozambican case, ideological coherence was undermined by several factors. Let us consider the following points:

1. There is a significant linguistic barrier between Mozambique – where the official language is Portuguese – and the rest of the largely English-speaking region. Moreover, in Cabo Delgado, the main languages are Makua, Makonde, Mwani, and Kiswahili. Only Tanzania's small detachment of troops could converse in Kiswahili, their home language, while the rest of SAMIM faced a linguistic divide. On the other hand, the RDF's experience in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) gave some of their soldiers' familiarity with Kiswahili.
2. While Mozambique maintains formal party-to-party ties with South Africa's ruling ANC, there is an enduring ambivalence by its security establishment over South Africa's regional dominance – an attitude coloured in part by the history of apartheid-era violence. Rwanda carries none of that baggage. Mo-

reover, it has proven its military competence in complex operations in the DRC and Central African Republic, while bilateral economic ties with Maputo have been growing (Trends Research & Advisory, 2024; Zitamar News, 2022).

3. Rwanda's intervention marks a subtle realignment in Southern Africa's security geopolitics. Kigali's swift deployment, backed politically and financially by France and the European Union, introduced a new axis of influence that effectively diluted SADC's traditional dominance over the regional security agenda (Cannon & Donelli, 2022; Council of the European Union, 2024). For France, whose energy giant TotalEnergies had suspended operations after the Palma attacks, the partnership with Rwanda provided an indirect channel to re-establish leverage in Mozambique without confronting SADC or South Africa openly (Olivier, 2023). Rwanda, in turn, gained diplomatic cover and financial support that elevated its standing as a credible regional security provider. This alignment effectively positioned Rwanda as France's "new Chad" in Africa – an agile, professional, and politically reliable force capable of acting where regional mechanisms stall (IFRI, 2023).

Comparing local acceptance of Rwandan and SADC forces

Local acceptance of Rwandan and SADC forces in Cabo Delgado varied significantly, reflecting differences in operational approaches, successes, and interactions with civilians. From the outset, the RDF were considered more effective and professional. They were better trained and better equipped than SAMIM forces. Operating in largely depopulated areas – with less regard for issues of proportionality – the RDF won early decisive engagements against ASWJ, expelling the insurgents from Palma and Mocímboa da Praia. The RDF's Kiswahili affinity also enabled more fluid interaction with the civilians they encountered, facilitating trust, and enhancing operational intelligence.

Additionally, they ran an efficient public relations campaign, providing unprecedented access to journalists (Zitamar News, 2022). Mocímboa da Praia's main fish market, now known locally as "Rwandan Market", was one of the first public structures rebuilt by the RDF after reclaiming the town. In January 2024, the RDF also handed over a newly rehabilitated primary school in Ntotwe, Mocímboa da Praia. Such visible improvements helped consolidate pragmatic legitimacy among local communities, who associated the RDF not only with military action, but a tangible return to normalcy.

By contrast, SAMIM was tasked with containing dispersed insurgent cells operating within more densely populated areas, which imposed significant operational constraints. The mission faced persistent logistical and equipment shortages that affected both morale and effectiveness. Its deployment was also initially led by lightly armed special forces, and the airlift capability that was key to its force planning never fully materialised. Confronted with small mobile insurgent groups, SAMIM often adopted a static posture, remaining within fortified bases rather than conducting aggressive patrols. Limited cultural and linguistic proximity further hindered efforts to build the kind of community rapport the RDF achieved.

In addition, Human Rights Watch (2023), documented instances of misconduct involving South African troops, including a widely circulated video showing soldiers burning the bodies of alleged insurgents. Complementary evidence from qualitative interviews conducted in Pemba in 2025¹⁶ also pointed to reports of harassment, intimidation, and exploitative interactions between military personnel and women, including sex workers in urban areas. Similar concerns were reported in relation to other contingents, including the Botswana Defence Force, prompting internal investigations by national authorities (Sunday Standard, 2023). Although the scale and verification of these incidents remain unclear, the reluctance of regional leaders to publicly address these concerns contributed to perception of limited accountability and weakened SAMIM's legitimacy among the affected communities.

SAMIM also struggled perennially with underfunding. It relied almost entirely on member state contributions channelled through the SADC Peace Fund and limited host-nation support from Mozambique. The absence of external funding, coupled with delayed national contributions, constrained air mobility, troop rotation, and equipment maintenance, slowing the mission's operational tempo (SADC Secretariat, 2024). That partly explains the mission's early transition from Scenario 6 – a rapid-intervention framework centred on full-scale offensive operations – to Scenario 5; a multidimensional stabilisation phase combining military, police, and a limited civilian component (SADC, 2024; SAMIM Compendium Report, 2024; Ministry of National Defence, 2024). The RDF, on the other hand, benefited from clear and timely financing – including €20 million from the European Peace Facility.

National politics and legitimacy

The Mozambican government's decision-making process regarding foreign intervention was profoundly influenced by domestic political considerations. With an urgent need to address the escalation of violence, Nyusi sought to balance FRELIMO's internal dynamics with the external pressures the government faced. The framing of the interventions increasingly focused on perceptions of national sovereignty, and the protection of foreign investments in the LNG sector. Over time, the Mozambican government presented the involvement of foreign forces as a calculated response to an external threat linked to international terrorism. This narrative contrasted with the government's initial discourse, which described the attackers as "faceless criminals". That formulation distanced the state from accountability and downplayed the political and socio-economic roots of the violence.

Some in FRELIMO insisted on upholding national sovereignty and resisted extensive foreign involvement: others were more open to pragmatic alliances considering the seriousness of the crisis. These internal divisions were driven in part by the influence of natural resource networks and competing elite agendas within FRELIMO, a dynamic observable before and during the July 2021 intervention (Sithole, 2021). These fractures aligned with competing political and business interests, particularly among influential southern-based elites and former military commanders with stakes in LNG, mining, and transport sectors. Their preferences and networks played a role in shaping both the timing and type of interventions favoured. The more discreet and security-focused support from Rwanda, for example, may have appealed to factions seeking control without the oversight or conditionalities often tied to multilateral missions such as SAMIM. Civil society organisations were quick to question the Kigali agreement's lack of transparency, and the absence of any formal parliamentary oversight.

State-controlled media generally amplified the government's framing of the interventions, emphasising the success of external military support – especially the role of the RDF. However, this coverage often reflected elite southern perspectives and may have failed to capture the concerns and lived experiences of communities in Cabo Delgado. Those perceptions included accusations of government neglect and corruption, and even conspiracy theories about official complicity, complicating public trust in the intervention (Global Initiative, 2022). Independent media and civil society voices also offered more critical accounts, questioning the strategic logic of the interventions, their implications for national sovereignty, and the political dynamics that led to the increasingly close relationship between Nyusi and Rwanda's

¹⁶ Field interviews conducted by a research team under the supervision of the author in Pemba, Cabo Delgado, August–September 2025

leadership. Concerns about Kigali's influence resurfaced after the ratification of a bilateral extradition treaty, which opposition members warned could endanger Rwandan refugees and dissidents living in Mozambique (Club of Mozambique, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2023).

Initially, in much of the country, there was a sense of urgency and support for any intervention that could contain the violence and restore stability. That public narrative evolved over time, reflected in the shifting media coverage and commentary by civil society and local observers. Early reporting captured a sense of relief and renewed confidence as Rwandan troops swiftly reclaimed Palma and Mocimboa da Praia, while SADC forces were still mobilising (Cabo Ligado Monthly, July 2021; O País, July 2021). A year later, coverage by the Centro para Democracia e Desenvolvimento (CDD) pointed to growing public frustration over the opacity of SAMIM operations and the government's management of information around the conflict (CDD, 2022). A 2025 field survey of women in conflict-affected districts of Cabo Delgado¹⁷ also documented shifts in perceptions of security and confidence following the deployment of Rwandan and SADC forces. Respondents consistently reported feeling safer after the arrival of foreign troops, though confidence in SAMIM declined over time compared to sustained trust in the RDF.

Social media was also a battleground for conflicting narratives, ranging from debates over the effectiveness and legitimacy of foreign forces, to calls for political dialogue with the insurgents. In parallel, Islamic State propaganda, disseminated via online channels, portrayed the conflict as a religious and anti-colonial struggle, instrumentalising local grievances to position ASWJ as defenders of Islam against "Christian invaders" (BBC Monitoring, 2022).

The Mozambican government's approach to foreign interventions reflected a complex interplay of internal political struggles, elite interests, and media narratives about the Cabo Delgado crisis. While the decision to involve regional and bilateral actors was justified publicly as response to the growing insurgency it was also shaped by divisions within FRELIMO over how to address the conflict. Although the government's framing of SADC and Rwanda's interventions sought to project legitimacy and control, critical media narratives – and the poor performance of the Mozambican security forces – underscored the challenges it faced in maintaining both the ideo-

logical and pragmatic legitimacy of the two external military deployments.

Meanwhile, the conflict continues. Although SADC formally withdrew its forces in July 2024 – a decision based on funding constraints and a new authorised deployment in the DRC – Rwandan troops currently remain in Mozambique, confronting an insurgency that has repeatedly proved its resilience.

Conclusion

he military intervention in Cabo Delgado, marked by the simultaneous presence of Rwandan and SADC troops, reveals the multiple layers and meanings of legitimacy that emerge in contexts of violent extremism, where threats are internal, identities are fragmented, and authority is often contested. This intervention unfolded amid ongoing violence, blurred civil-military boundaries, and competing claims to represent the state and protect civilians.

This analysis shows that legitimacy cannot be understood solely through normative or institutional frameworks but must also account for the perceptions of affected communities, domestic political considerations, and regional dynamics.

While SADC initially benefited from ideological legitimacy rooted in historical ties and a perception of regional solidarity, its practical legitimacy was increasingly questioned due to limited operational results. Rwanda, on the other hand, gradually built pragmatic legitimacy by demonstrating concrete results and visible actions to improve local security.

However, none of these dimensions are static or uniformly perceived. Different segments of the population – such as displaced communities in conflict-affected districts, political elites in Maputo, and local civil society actors – attributed varied meanings to the foreign military presence. While displaced populations tended to assess the interventions in terms of physical safety and humanitarian access, political elites framed them through the lens of foreign policy and regime security (O País, 2021; Club of Mozambique, 2023)¹⁸. Local civil society, in turn, questioned both missions' transparency and long-term legitimacy, with attitudes varying from pragmatic acceptance and gratitude to suspicion and fears of securitisation or marginalisation (CDD, 2022; CIP, 2023).

¹⁷ The survey was conducted among approximately 710 women in five districts of Cabo Delgado. It captured local perceptions of security before and after the deployment of SAMIM and the RDF. Although the survey results have been analysed in a separate publication, key trends are consistent with the argument presented here.

¹⁸ The public debate captured in outlets such as O País) and Club of Mozambique reflected a pragmatic reading of Rwanda's intervention as effective and politically expedient.

The case of Mozambique illustrates that legitimacy is ultimately a dynamic and contested process. Any external effort to support peace and security must acknow-

ledge this complexity, prioritising not only operational effectiveness, but also local engagement, internal political coherence, and sensitivity to regional relations.

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Protecting Donors Investments in Somalia: AUSSOM and its Predecessors

Samira Gaid

For nearly two decades, African Union (AU) missions in Somalia have been at the forefront of international efforts to stabilise the country, counter the al-Shabaab insurgency, and support Somalia's state-building process. Despite operational challenges and shifting political dynamics, the missions have played a pivotal role in advancing Somalia's federalisation process, securing key institutions and urban centres, and facilitating the gradual rebuilding of the Somali National Security Forces (SNSF).

However, the future of AU missions – and by extension, Somalia's security and governance systems – have been in jeopardy since the beginning of 2025 (Amani Africa, 2025). With the transition from the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) to the AU Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), the new mission's composition, objectives, and operational framework remained unclear, with rushed and belated discussions concluding at the 11th hour. Unfortunately, though, this did not include agreement on the financing mechanism for the new mission. The lack of secure financing for AUSSOM has cast a long shadow over the mission viability, and raised serious doubts over the AU's ability to sustain its past successes.

Concurrently, the broader war against al-Shabaab has stagnated. Since the government-led offensives of 2022-2023, al-Shabaab has re-organised and is regaining territory, reversing some of the hard-fought wins of the security forces (Hummel, 2025). Parallel to these setbacks, there are growing concerns about Somalia's governance trajectory, with unresolved political disputes, limited institutional capacity, and recurrent rifts between the federal government and its member states. These challenges are unfolding amid rising geopolitical tensions and declining international engagement, further complicating Somalia's security outlook.

Against this backdrop, securing the progress achieved over the past two decades requires urgent and strategic action. This chapter argues that to protect donor investments and consolidate past gains, international partners need to act swiftly; going beyond traditional security-

centric approaches. While ensuring sustainable financing for AUSSOM remains a top priority, equal emphasis must be placed on political stability, governance reforms, and an inclusive security strategy. This inclusive security approach must consider both federal forces and state-level security actors. Without such a comprehensive and multi-dimensional initiative, the risk of relapse remains high, threatening to unravel the progress that billions of dollars in donor contributions have sought to achieve.

The evolution from AMISOM to AUSSOM

Over the past two decades, the AU's engagement in Somalia has evolved in response to shifting political realities, financial and operational constraints, and the evolving nature of the conflict. AMISOM's initial mandate was conceived as a short-term stabilisation force to secure Mogadishu, install the then Transitional Federal Government, and handover to a UN mission. However, Somalia's instability made a UN deployment unfeasible, leading to multiple mandate extensions that transformed AMISOM into the AU's longest-running and most complex peace operation. Eighteen-years later, the mission has transitioned twice, with each iteration facing the same mismatched challenges of ambitious mandates and limited resources.

Until now, the AU missions in Somalia functioned under a hybrid financing model. The European Union (EU) covered troop stipends, the UN Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) provided logistical support, and bilateral partners such as the United States and United Kingdom supplemented with equipment and training programmes. Despite this multi-layered support, AMISOM grappled with chronic financial instability. In 2016, the EU cut troop stipends by 20%, leading to delayed payments and morale issues. The mission also suffered from critical capability gaps, including a lack of air support and specialised military enablers, which hampered its ability

to conduct sustained offensives against al-Shabaab. These financial and logistical constraints triggered repeated mission-wide crises. By the time AMISOM transitioned to ATMIS in 2022, its force strength had dropped by 4,000 from a peak of 22,126 uniformed personnel.

ATMIS was designed to gradually transfer security responsibilities to the SNSF under a phased withdrawal. The troop contributors, and areas of operation, were to remain the same as under AMISOM, but ATMIS was explicitly structured to avoid an indefinite military presence. However, it inherited AMISOM's financial troubles. The EU, the mission's largest financial backer, had scaled back its support due in part to competing global crises. As a result, ATMIS operated under financial strain from the outset, struggling with delayed troop payments and a persistent funding gap. By December 2024, ATMIS had drawn down to 12,626 uniformed personnel, despite concerns over Somalia's readiness to take over security responsibilities.

When AUSSOM was inaugurated on 1 January 2025, its funding, composition, and strategic objectives remained uncertain. The mission's launch was overshadowed by geopolitical tensions that pitted Ethiopia against Somalia, particularly over the Ethiopia-Somaliland Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).¹⁹ After Turkish mediation, the MoU issues were laid to rest, and Somalia – which had hitherto rejected the inclusion of Ethiopian troops – finally accepted Ethiopia's reintegration within AUSSOM. The MoU tensions, however, continued to reverberate. Egypt was invited to join as a new troop contributor by the Somali government, but this led to the withdrawal of Burundi – a longstanding security partner – as its troop numbers were correspondingly reduced.

To address AUSSOM's financing woes, the Somali government and AU lobbied for UN Security Council Resolution 2719, which proposed covering up to 75% of AUSSOM's budget through UN-assessed contributions, with the remaining amount funded by the AU and other international partners. If implemented, this would have been the first predictable funding mechanism for the AU-led peace support mission in Somalia, and a historic shift toward predictable financing for AU-led missions in general.

However, significant uncertainties persisted with the United States expressing strong opposition to the 2719 model. This was reflected in a decision by the Security Council in May 2025 to request the AU and UN to revisit other channels to mobilise financing. Furthermore, a re-

surgence of al-Shabaab has raised concerns regarding AUSSOM's reduced troop size and its ability to maintain security. Somalia is also embarking on its electoral cycle, increasing fears that fragile governance institutions may struggle to sustain recent security gains.

From AMISOM to ATMIS and now AUSSOM, each iteration of the AU mission has reinforced a fundamental truth: peace support operations cannot succeed without predictable and sustainable financing. The chronic funding instability that plagued AMISOM and ATMIS clearly undermined their effectiveness, perpetuating cycles of crisis.

The build-up of the Somali National Security Forces

The SNSF represent the foundation of Somalia's security infrastructure, expected to take over from AMISOM and its successors. Despite billions of dollars invested in training and equipping Somali forces, their effectiveness remains a mixed picture. While some progress has been made in force generation and counter-terrorism operations, deep structural weaknesses, political fragmentation, and funding inconsistencies continue to hinder their ability to fully assume national security responsibilities.

The Somali Transition Plan, launched in 2018, aimed for a gradual handover of security responsibilities from AU missions to the SNSF. However, progress has been slow, and much of the focus has remained on federal forces, particularly the Somali National Army (SNA), while regional security units have been largely overlooked. This despite the fact that Somalia's security sector remains fragmented, with multiple loosely coordinated forces operating at both federal and regional levels, often divided by clan loyalties and political affiliations. These divisions complicate efforts to build and utilise a cohesive national military capable of fighting the insurgency and maintaining stability.

Despite ongoing challenges, the national forces have made some notable strides. They have expanded at both the federal and regional levels, although not all units are fully operational, financed, or adequately equipped. Training initiatives from various partners have contributed to more professional outfits, with strengthened elite counter-terrorism capabilities via the Turkish-trained Gorgor and US-trained Danab units. Significantly, between 2022-2023, coordinated Somali security forces in Hirshabelle and Galmudug, supported by international partners, led successful offensives against al-Shabaab, reclaiming key areas. In late 2024, Puntland began offensive operations against Islamic State in Somalia

¹⁹ Signed on 1 January 2024 between the leaders of Ethiopia and a self-declared independent Somaliland, reportedly granting Addis Ababa a 50-year lease on a strip of coastline on the Gulf of Aden.

(ISIS) militants in the Cali Miskad mountains of the Bari region, compelling the group to retreat. The anti-ISIS offensives have been successful and widely lauded, notably conducted without support from the federal government.

Yet significant structural and operational deficiencies remain among the different Somali security forces. Clan loyalties and political fragmentation have undermined command cohesion, with the forces of the six Federal Member States (FMS) often operating independently from the central government. At the federal level, there has been a reluctance to share security assistance with the FMS, especially those confronting significant threats. At the FMS level, political leaders resist integration efforts, preferring to retain control over their regional forces. Persistent political divisions have occasionally escalated into armed confrontations between federal and regional forces. Notably, in December 2024, intense clashes erupted in Ras Kamboni, close to the Kenyan border, between the SNA, and Jubaland's Darawiish paramilitary units. The confrontation resulted in the defeat of the federal troops, with over 250 SNA soldiers surrendering, and approximately 600 crossing into Kenya where they were disarmed by the Kenyan army.

Beyond political divisions, the SNSF are heavily donor-dependent, with funding inconsistencies affecting salary payments, equipment procurement, and logistics. Improvements in salary disbursements at the federal level are not replicated at the regional level, while persistent equipment shortages have left many units lacking adequate firepower, transport, and medical support. Corruption also remains a major issue, with embezzlement diverting resources from operational needs. In addition, the SNSF still lack critical capabilities, particularly in air support, counter-IED expertise, and intelligence coordination.

To ensure a successful transition from AUSSOM to full Somali security responsibility, a strategic reassessment is imperative. A cohesive and realistic national security framework is essential to tackle the recurrent and costly internal conflicts and lack of coordination. Additionally, governance and accountability must be strengthened, while capacity-building efforts should seek to address Somalia's reliance on external support. Without these improvements, the withdrawal of AU forces could expose Somalia to renewed security threats, undermining years of progress.

The missing link: Governance and political stabilisation

For years, international efforts in Somalia have focused primarily on military responses, neglecting governance and political stabilisation. AU-led missions have helped degrade al-Shabaab, secure key urban centres, and establish a federal system and key institutions. However, weak governance structures and political institutions continue to fuel instability. While the AU and international partners have prioritised the security sector, administrative reforms have been underfunded and inconsistently implemented. This imbalance has created a dangerous cycle – temporary military gains followed by a resurgence of instability due to governance failures.

One of the most significant obstacles is political fragmentation, particularly between the centre and the periphery. Cooperation between the central and regional governments has proven dysfunctional. The FMSs' regularly accuse the federal government of attempts to centralise power, while regional leaders resist federal authority, leading to deadlock over governance, resource distribution, and security coordination. Delayed and contested elections have further eroded trust among political actors, with elite infighting distracting from much-needed state-building efforts. This has complicated Somalia's ability to develop a cohesive security and governance strategy. Without political consensus on security governance, Somalia cannot effectively consolidate its security forces or implement a stable transition plan.

Administrative weakness has also allowed al-Shabaab to exploit power vacuums. The militant group operates a parallel governance structure, collecting taxes, and delivering security in the territories it controls. The group also provides dispute resolution through its mobile courts – services the Somali government struggles to dispense. Whenever AU and Somali forces liberate territory, the government often fails to establish effective governance structures, allowing al-Shabaab to return and regain control. Corruption, nepotism, and mismanagement within the administrative and security sectors have weakened cohesion, further undermining Somalia's stability.

While international donors have invested heavily in Somalia's security sector, governance reforms lack international investment and coordination, with different actors pushing competing agendas. This disjointed approach has made reform slow, inconsistent, and largely dictated by short-term political considerations rather than long-term stability. For Somalia to break the cycle of insecurity, a balanced approach that integrates governance, security, and economic reforms is essential. This approach should include strengthening state institutions, improving federal-state cooperation, ensuring financial transparency, and delivering essential services that restore public trust.

Policy recommendations

To protect donor investments and maintain the gains made, Somalia, the AU, and international partners must adopt policies that prioritise long-term financial stability, institutional reform, and a unified security approach.

1. Securing predictable and sustainable security sector funding

One of the greatest challenges in Somalia's security transition is chronic financial instability, with AU missions and Somali security forces relying heavily on inconsistent donor support. Without a predictable funding model, security sector development remains vulnerable to political shifts and global crises. To address this, Somalia and its partners must urgently establish a stable financial framework that reduces dependence on ad hoc donor pledges. This framework would need to be linked to specific timelines and benchmarks. This would ensure that Somalia's security sector has reliable financial support at this critical moment.

At the same time, Somalia must work towards self-sufficiency in financing its security forces. This requires domestic revenue generation, strengthened tax collection mechanisms, and financial transparency to prevent corruption and mismanagement. Financial oversight systems – involving key security partners – could be established to right size the forces, monitor security spending, harmonise international assistance, and prevent inefficiencies caused by fragmented donor programmes.

2. Strengthening governance and institutional capacity

Somalia's security challenges are deeply linked to governance failures. Delinking the political challenges from the chronic insecurity provides a very limited view of Somalia's protracted conflict. Without functioning institutions, strong rule of law, and public trust in government,

military gains will not be sustainable. To ensure long-term stability, governance reforms must be implemented alongside security sector development.

The federal government and FMSs should establish clear governance structures and power-sharing agreements to prevent the political deadlock that has historically hampered state-building. This would lead to a federal security framework that clearly defines roles and responsibilities between federal and regional security forces, ensuring that decision-making processes are transparent and inclusive.

Governance reforms must also extend beyond Mogadishu. The Somali government – at federal and regional levels – should establish credible local administrations in liberated areas to prevent al-Shabaab from exploiting governance vacuums and re-establishing control. Additionally, anti-corruption measures, financial oversight, and independent audits must be institutionalised to improve accountability within the SNSF and broader public administration.

3. Integrating federal and regional security forces under a unified command

One of the greatest obstacles to a successful security transition is the fragmentation of security forces. Federal and regional security units operate independently, creating gaps in coordination, and leaving Somalia vulnerable to external interference in security matters.

To address this, Somalia must implement a unified chain of command ensuring that FMS security forces are integrated into the national security framework under federal oversight, while maintaining their regional responsibilities. This will require negotiating clear political agreements between the federal government and FMSs, standardising security protocols, and sharing resources equitably.

A National Security Integration Plan should align training programmes, equipment distribution, and salary structures across federal and regional forces. This will prevent local security units from becoming politicised militias, and ensure that all Somali forces operate with a shared national security mandate. Negotiating this unification is the most critical task if Somalia's security forces are to attempt security ownership.

4. Bridging critical security capacity gaps

To prepare the SNSF for full responsibility over national security, Somalia and its partners must prioritise investment in critical security capacities that remain underdeveloped.

A primary focus should be on reducing Somalia's reliance on foreign forces for air reconnaissance, troop mobility, and airstrikes. This will enhance Somalia's ability to conduct independent security operations.

Enhancing elite units such as Gorgor and Danab – while ensuring they are fully integrated within a national framework – will also enhance Somalia's ability to combat al-Shabaab without relying on AU forces. Additionally, Somalia must implement its nationwide strategy for countering IED threats, investing in modern detection technologies, bomb disposal units, and improved road security to mitigate al-Shabaab's use of roadside explosives.

Border and maritime security should also be strengthened. Somalia must work cohesively and develop strategies to prevent arms smuggling, terrorist infiltration, and illegal trafficking. Coordination and sharing of responsibilities between the federal government and FMSs is key if Somalia is to effectively counter piracy, illicit weapons shipments, illegal fishing, and secure its coastal waters and trade routes.

5. Aligning international support with long-term security and political objectives

International actors have played a key role in Somalia's security transition, but competing donor agendas and geopolitical rivalries have sometimes undermined state-building efforts. To ensure international engagement is effective and sustainable, donors must align their interventions. Instead of focusing on military-first approaches, international partners should balance security assistance with governance and economic development. Security funding could be directly tied to governance benchmarks, ensuring that state institutions and rule of law structures are strengthened alongside military capabilities.

To prevent competing security models, the Somali government should also strive to ensure regional actors coordinate their security assistance through formal mechanisms. This will help avoid political divisions in the security sector and promote a unified approach to state-building.

Finally, Somalia's security reforms must be accompanied by stabilisation efforts. Partners should strive to invest in programmes and incentives to address the root causes of instability and reduce the appeal of extremist groups.

Conclusion

Securing Somalia's future requires a shift away from short-term military solutions to a long-term stabilisation strategy that integrates security, governance, and economic development. Without stable funding, institutional reform, and improved coordination between federal and regional forces, the transition from AUSSOM risks failing to sustain security gains.

The international community must recognise that military investments alone cannot guarantee Somalia's stability. Strong governance, political stability, and economic resilience are equally critical in achieving a self-sufficient Somali security sector.

Somalia has the potential to move beyond decades of external dependency and emerge as a functioning state capable of managing its own security and administrative systems. A future where Somalia is stable, self-reliant, and secure is possible – but only if governance, security, and economic priorities are addressed simultaneously.

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Mission Creep? The Role of the Regional ECOMIG Forces in The Gambia

Sait Matty Jaw

The story of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Mission in The Gambia (ECOMIG) is, in many ways, one of regional solidarity, swift diplomacy, and preventive action. Yet it also reveals the inherent complexities and contradictions of a foreign military presence in a democratising context. ECOMIG's deployment in January 2017 followed the unexpected outcome of The Gambia's presidential election, where after 22 years of authoritarian rule, Yahya Jammeh was defeated by opposition candidate Adama Barrow backed by a coalition of opposition parties. Though Jammeh initially conceded, he quickly reversed his stance, alleging electoral irregularities, and demanded a rerun. This triggered a constitutional crisis that prompted urgent mediation by regional leaders, backed by the African Union and the United Nations. It ultimately led to the activation of a military force mandated to uphold the electoral outcome and prevent a descent into violence (PSCC, 2020; Omotosho and Senghore, 2018).

ECOMIG's arrival was initially viewed as a landmark success in African diplomacy and regional security cooperation. Without the use of force, ECOWAS troops facilitated Jammeh's peaceful departure and Barrow's return from Senegal to assume office. Designed as a six-month mission focused on stabilisation and protection, ECOMIG has now remained in the country for over seven years. Its mandate, scope, and functions have expanded, gradually transforming what was intended as a temporary intervention into a semi-permanent component of The Gambia's security architecture, reflecting the classic trajectory of "mission creep".

This chapter critically examines the evolution of ECOMIG within The Gambia's post-authoritarian landscape. Drawing on ECOWAS communiqués, national and regional media, civil society accounts, and academic literature (Hartmann, 2017; Birchinger et al., 2023), it interrogates how a regional intervention, designed to safeguard democracy, has become enmeshed in contested debates over national sovereignty, political legitimacy, and regional hegemony. While acknowledging ECOMIG's success in averting immediate conflict, the chapter highlights how its prolonged presence has constrained national ownership of security reform, and strained relations with

affected communities – particularly in Jammeh's home district of Foni. It has also raised questions within ECOWAS about the long-term role of regional missions in national political transitions. The analysis offers broader insights into the politics of African peace support operations, underscoring the importance of mandate clarity, exit strategies, and the need to balance stabilisation with long-term democratic consolidation.

Background and context

The Gambia's political crisis in December 2016 marked a critical juncture, not only for the country's democratic trajectory, but also for regional approaches to enforcing constitutional order. After over two decades of authoritarian rule under Jammeh, Gambians delivered a surprising and emphatic electoral verdict by electing Barrow, the candidate of a united opposition coalition. Jammeh initially accepted the result but reversed his stance a week later, alleging irregularities and demanding a rerun – triggering a constitutional standoff that had the potential for violence (Omotosho and Senghore, 2018; Al Jazeera, 2017).

Jammeh's intransigence presented a significant dilemma for ECOWAS, which had by then developed a reputation for conflict mediation and norm-setting in the region. In this case, ECOWAS invoked its 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, justifying coercive intervention under the banner of protecting democratic legitimacy (ECOWAS Communiqué 2017; Jeng 2020). Backed by the AU, UN, and ECOWAS leaders – including Senegal's Macky Sall and Nigeria's Muhammadu Buhari – ECOWAS launched Operation Restore Democracy, culminating in the formal deployment of ECOMIG on 19 January 2017, the same day Barrow was sworn in at The Gambian embassy in Dakar, Senegal.

ECOMIG's initial mandate was tightly focused: to secure the environment for Barrow's return, protect state institutions, and maintain public order. The rapid and unopposed entry of approximately 4,000 troops – primarily from Senegal, Nigeria, and Ghana – symbolised regional

resolve and was instrumental in facilitating Jammeh's peaceful departure on 21 January 2017 (PSCC, 2020; Jawla et al., 2024). The mission was hailed as a success by many Gambians – especially in urban areas – as well as civil society and the diaspora, who interpreted the intervention as a moment of convergence between popular will and regional enforcement of democratic norms (Witta and Schnabel, 2020; Birchinger et al., 2023).

However, embedded within this early triumph were signs of strategic and structural ambiguity. The absence of a clearly defined exit strategy, coupled with the new government's dependency on external security forces, laid the groundwork for an extended presence. Barrow's administration, still fragile, leaned heavily on ECOMIG; not only for ceremonial security, but also to reinforce internal stability and bolster state authority. Subsequent mandate extensions were granted without broad-based consultation or parliamentary scrutiny, raising early concerns around transparency, public accountability, and host-state consent.

Over time, ECOMIG's mission drifted beyond its initial parameters. The historical legacies of a politicised security sector, the weaknesses of transitional institutions, and the strategic interests of ECOWAS member states – especially Senegal's security imperatives in the Casamance border region – converged to sustain the mission's presence (Evans, 2022; JAWLA et al., 2024). What began as a textbook case of preventive diplomacy and democratic enforcement gradually evolved into a complex and contested military engagement, raising important questions about mandate creep, regional sovereignty, and the balance between stabilisation and national ownership. Understanding this background is essential to critically assess how ECOMIG's role evolved, and why its prolonged presence has become the subject of public debate and scholarly inquiry across The Gambia and the region.

Operational scope and achievements

From its inception, ECOMIG served not merely as a deterrent but as a decisive mechanism of political enforcement during a period of profound national uncertainty. The pressure it exerted on Jammeh, leading to his peaceful departure without widespread violence, remains one of the clearest successes of regional diplomacy backed by credible military resolve (Ceesay, 2020; Hartmann, 2017). In this respect, ECOMIG functioned as more than a peacekeeping force; it embodied the use of a military posture to reinforce democratic outcomes, le-

gitimised by ECOWAS's Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.

Following the de-escalation of the immediate crisis, ECOMIG's role evolved towards stabilisation and security sector support. The mission provided direct protection to Barrow and key state installations, conducted joint patrols with The Gambia Armed Forces (GAF) and the police, and participated in basic security tasks such as infrastructure defence and border monitoring (Ceesay, 2020; ECOWAS, 2018). By early 2018, its troop numbers were reduced, but its presence remained politically significant and operationally visible, particularly in strategic areas (Evans, 2022; EU EOM, 2019).

ECOMIG also created critical security guarantees that enabled the roll out of transitional mechanisms, including the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC), and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). Civil society organisations and independent media platforms similarly benefited from a less repressive environment. Without ECOMIG's deterrent effect, these efforts may have been undermined by Jammeh loyalists or factions within the unreformed security apparatus (Jaw, 2020; ICTJ, 2018).

The mission further supported electoral processes. It provided visible and logistical security during the 2017 National Assembly elections, which were pivotal in re-configuring parliamentary power in the post-Jammeh era. In the 2021 presidential election, ECOMIG again played a stabilising role during heightened political contestation, its presence helping to mitigate fears of violence.

On the technical front, ECOMIG partnered with ECOWAS, the European Union, and the UN Development Programme to promote security sector reform. Its engagements focused on professionalisation, human rights training, and civil-military relations. However, questions remain about the sustainability and depth of these efforts, especially in the absence of full national ownership or institutional autonomy (European Union, 2019; Alcázar, 2019).

Perhaps one of the less recognised contributions of ECOMIG was psychological reassurance. In the early post-Jammeh period, many Gambians – especially in the capital, Banjul, and urban centres – perceived the presence of a neutral foreign force as a buffer against the return of authoritarian violence. This symbolic assurance was essential for fostering confidence in transitional processes and encouraging the civic re-engagement of previously silenced actors (Witt and Schnabel, 2020).

Nonetheless, ECOMIG's effectiveness and reception have not been uniform. While broadly welcomed in reformist

and urban circles, the mission has been met with growing scepticism in other regions. As the mission persisted beyond its initial timeline, criticisms emerged regarding its lack of transparency, limited public consultation, and the absence of clear benchmarks for its withdrawal (Jawla et al., 2024; Afrobarometer, 2021).

Mission creep: Evolution of the mandate

Mission creep refers to the gradual and often unplanned expansion of a mission's scope beyond its original objectives, typically without corresponding recalibration or robust public debate. In the case of ECOMIG, this shift did not result from a single policy decision but rather from a series of incremental mandate renewals, role expansions, and shifting justifications. What began in 2017 as a time-bound stabilisation deployment has evolved into a quasi-permanent regional security presence, one increasingly entangled in Gambian domestic politics and regional geopolitical interests.

Originally deployed under a six-month mandate, ECOMIG's primary objectives were clear: to facilitate the peaceful transfer of power, provide immediate protection to Barrow and state institutions, and deter violence from former regime loyalists. However, in mid-2017, the Barrow administration requested an extension of ECOMIG's mandate. While official justifications emphasised the need for continued stabilisation, observers and analysts have linked the decision to unresolved tensions within the GAF and the slow progress of security sector reform (ECOWAS, 2017; Ceesay, 2020; Marenah, 2021). ECOWAS acquiesced – initiating a cycle of informal extensions and evolving roles that lacked transparent benchmarks for withdrawal (ECOWAS Communiqués, 2018-2024).

Over time, observers noted that successive extensions of ECOMIG's mandate were accompanied by shifting political justifications. While the mission was initially deployed to secure the electoral transition, its continued presence was increasingly framed in terms of support for security sector reform, the protection of democratic gains, and responses to regional instability. Although these shifts were not formally codified in ECOWAS communiqués, they gradually blurred the line between short-term crisis management and a more open-ended security presence, raising concerns about sovereignty and host-state dependency.

A notable turning point occurred in 2022, when ECOMIG troops – predominantly Senegalese – engaged in cross-border security operations near the Casamance region. Clashes with Movement of Democratic Forces of Casa-

mance (MFDC) separatists underscored ECOMIG's expanding regional security posture and sparked criticism that the mission was increasingly serving Senegal's national interests rather than The Gambia's internal transition. While ECOWAS and The Gambian authorities justified these operations as necessary for regional stability, critics viewed them as a geopolitical overstep inconsistent with the original mandate (Standard, 2022; Evans, 2022).

Concurrently, the political narrative around ECOMIG's presence began to shift. Initially framed as a safeguard against authoritarian relapse, the mission's extension was later justified by Barrow on the grounds of ongoing reforms, and the need to protect the country's fragile democracy. In a 2020 address to the ECOWAS Authority – the organisation's highest decision-making body – he requested an extension of the mandate, citing reform efforts and persistent risks to stability (ECOWAS, 2020).

These shifts did not go unnoticed. Civil society leaders and former officials, including former Foreign Minister Sidi Sanneh, warned in media interviews that the prolonged presence of ECOMIG risked undermining Gambian sovereignty and delaying the national ownership of reform. Sanneh emphasised the need for a national consultation to determine the mission's future (Marenah, 2021).

Public opinion data confirms this declining legitimacy. Afrobarometer surveys from 2018 to 2021 show, despite ongoing insecurity, a sharp increase in support for ECOMIG's withdrawal – from 50% to 78% – while also reflecting relatively high trust in the GAF. Support for the mission dropped most significantly in the West Coast Region, especially Foni, where ECOMIG is increasingly viewed as an external imposition and linked to local disputes, alleged abuses, and fatal confrontations (Afrobarometer, 2019; 2021; Jawla et al., 2024).

Challenges and criticisms

Although ECOMIG was initially celebrated as a model of preventive diplomacy, its extended presence has raised serious concerns around sovereignty, reform stagnation, human rights, and regional geopolitics.

1. Sovereignty and public legitimacy

The most emotive critique concerns the perception that ECOMIG has compromised Gambian sovereignty. While its early deployment was broadly welcomed, the long-term presence of foreign – particularly Senegalese – troops has provoked nationalist unease. In regions like Foni, where support for Jammeh remains strong, resi-

dents have accused ECOMIG of discrimination, harassment, and interference in local affairs – especially following the 2022 clashes near the Casamance border (The Defense Post, 2022; The Point, 2022). National Assembly members from the region have openly called for the withdrawal of the mission.

Afrobarometer data confirms this shift in public sentiment: support for ECOMIG's withdrawal rose from 50% in 2018 to 78% in 2021 (Afrobarometer, 2021). Critics increasingly view the mission as a security buffer for the Barrow administration rather than a neutral stabilising force. This perception has been reinforced by the repeated renewal of ECOMIG's mandate without broad-based consultation or parliamentary oversight (Ceesay, 2020).

2. Delayed Security Sector Reform (SSR)

ECOMIG was intended to help create a secure environment for the implementation SSR. However, its prolonged presence has arguably contributed to the delay of these reforms. While initiatives such as the National Security Policy (2019) and the Security Sector Reform Strategy (2020-2024) were launched with donor support, their implementation has lagged, and progress remains uneven (EU Delegation, 2019; CRPD and FES PSCC, 2025). Barrow's early mistrust of the GAF, many of whom had ties to the Jammeh regime, led to an overreliance on ECOMIG for internal security. This dynamic undermined institutional ownership of SSR and contributed to a dual security structure. Reports indicate that some Gambian officers felt sidelined, expressing frustration over the outsourcing of core security functions to a foreign force, which they viewed as politically driven and demoralising (Ceesay, 2020; Marenah, 2021).

3. Human rights and accountability

Though ECOMIG has not been associated with systemic abuse, there have been credible reports of localised misconduct, particularly in the Foni region. Allegations include harassment, excessive use of force, and a lack of transparency in operational conduct. For instance, the 2022 border incident near Casamance triggered civilian displacement and fear among local populations. Civil society actors and regional media have raised concerns over the mission's legal framework, its rules of engagement, and the absence of independent complaint mechanisms; issues that stand in contrast to international peacekeeping standards and have eroded public trust in the mission's neutrality.

4. Regional politics and ECOWAS credibility

ECOMIG's Senegalese leadership has raised persistent concerns about ECOWAS's neutrality, particularly in the

context of the Casamance conflict. Analysts and civil society actors argue that the mission may be serving Senegal's national interests as much as it supports Gambian stabilisation efforts (Evans, 2022). These concerns are amplified by the deployment of Senegalese-led ECOMIG forces in border areas close to the MFDC insurgency, which many view as entangling The Gambia in regional dynamics not directly linked to its own internal security needs. Meanwhile, ECOWAS continues to grapple with growing intervention fatigue and legitimacy questions, particularly following a series of coups in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger, which have undermined its credibility and raised critical questions about the long-term value and sustainability of peace missions like ECOMIG.

Lessons and future outlook

The ECOMIG experience presents important lessons for peace support operations, especially in fragile democracies undergoing post-authoritarian transitions. While the mission was initially effective in averting violence and stabilising the political environment, its extended presence exposed challenges related to the ambiguity of its mandate, host-state dependency, and contested legitimacy.

One key lesson is the need for clear mandates and time-bound exit strategies. ECOMIG's original six-month deployment to support the peaceful transfer of power lacked a public transition framework beyond that immediate objective. Subsequent extensions were made without structured national consultation or transparent benchmarks for progress, contributing to the perception of an open-ended occupation and mission creep (Ceesay, 2020; FES PSCC, 2020). Future regional interventions should establish measurable goals – such as the conclusion of transitional justice processes, the vetting of security institutions, or the conduct of credible elections – and link mandate renewals to public reporting and inclusive review processes.

The Gambian case also highlights the tension between short-term stabilisation and long-term institution-building. ECOMIG offered a security buffer during a sensitive period but this inadvertently delayed hard decisions on reforming the GAF and police. Continued executive reliance on regional forces has weakened national ownership and demotivated local actors, while contributing to institutional fragmentation (Marenah, 2021). Peace support missions must therefore be coupled with sustained investment in national capacity-building, grounded in principles of civilian oversight and democratic accountability.

Finally, the experience underlines the importance of public engagement. ECOMIG's legitimacy has declined over time, in part due to limited communication and the absence of open dialogue about its evolving mandate. In regions like Foni, mistrust and misinformation were amplified by the perceived lack of neutrality. Moving forward, regional interventions must prioritise transparency, legislative oversight, and civil society participation. In The Gambia, a national dialogue on the future of ECOMIG could help foster local ownership of security governance and guide a responsible, consensus-driven path to withdrawal.

Conclusion

The deployment of ECOMIG marked a watershed moment for regional peace operations in West Africa, demonstrating ECOWAS's resolve to uphold democratic transitions. In its initial phase, the mission was effective in averting violence, securing the transfer of power, and stabilising the post-authoritarian landscape. Yet, as the mission endured, its extended presence raised critical

concerns – ranging from mission creep and sovereignty erosion to reform stagnation and declining public legitimacy.

While ECOMIG played a stabilising role, its protracted deployment without a defined exit strategy ultimately complicated the very reforms it was meant to facilitate. The Gambia's experience underscores that regional interventions must be time-bound, transparent, and grounded in local ownership. Security guarantees alone cannot substitute for long-term institution-building.

As ECOWAS, the Gambian government, and civil society deliberate on the mission's future, the focus must shift from indefinite security provision to empowering national institutions and restoring democratic accountability. A phased and consultative withdrawal – anchored in clear benchmarks and public dialogue – can enable ECOMIG to conclude, not in controversy, but as a successful chapter in The Gambia's democratic consolidation. In doing so, it will reaffirm the principle that regional solidarity must ultimately support – not supplant – sovereign self-governance.

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Mission Exits: What Lessons Learned?

Hubert Kinkoh

For over three decades, peacekeeping operations in Africa have been crucial to ending conflicts, protecting civilians, and supporting political transitions. Although much of the focus has been on the mandates and performance of these missions, equally critical has been the design and impact of their demise. Poorly timed or unsupported exits can create security vacuums, undermine political progress, and erode trust. Conversely, phased withdrawals – with clear benchmarks and robust handovers – can consolidate gains and foster stability.

This chapter examines seven United Nations and hybrid peacekeeping missions – UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone, ONUB in Burundi, MINURCAT in Central Africa/Chad, UNOCI in Côte d'Ivoire, UNMIL in Liberia, UNAMID in Darfur, and MINUSMA in Mali. The aim is to identify patterns in conflict contexts, mandates, exit strategies, follow-on arrangements, and post-exit dynamics, which can help guide future peacekeeping drawdowns and responsible transitions.

UNAMSIL (Sierra Leone)

Sierra Leone's decade-long civil war (1991-2002) was triggered by long-standing grievance over corrupt governance. It pitted an insurgent Revolutionary United Front, in alliance with a group of dissident soldiers known as the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, against what had become a broad-based civilian government (EBSCO, 2021). A series of failed accords culminated in the Lomé Peace Agreement in 1999, which led to the Security Council authorising the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) in October 1999 under Resolution 1270.

Its mandate encompassed ceasefire monitoring and support to the Lomé Accord; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration; protection of civilians and UN personnel; and electoral assistance and humanitarian coordination (UNSC, 1999). Initially authorised for up to 6,000 personnel, UNAMSIL's strength eventually peaked at more than 17,500 troops by 2001. They were reinforced

by military observers, police units, and civilian staff tasked with electoral assistance, human rights monitoring, and humanitarian coordination (UNAMSIL, 2005). The mission had robust rules of engagement, enabling proactive protection of both UN personnel and civilians.

UNAMSIL exited in December 2005 after playing a significant role in Sierra Leone's transition from war to peace. Benchmarks set by the Security Council – state consolidation, military re-training, and credible elections – had largely been met. Resolution 1610 adopted in June 2005 extended the mandate for six months, initiating a phased drawdown from mid-August, with a final withdrawal completed by 31 December 2005 (UNSC, 2005).

The UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) succeeded UNAMSIL on 1 January 2006 for an initial 12 months to ensure continuity of support (UN 2005). UNIOSIL pivoted the UN's focus toward long-term peacebuilding, poverty reduction, and support for anti-corruption measures. The strategy involved progressively transferring security responsibilities to the Sierra Leone Armed Forces and police, concurrent with the deployment of a UN country team to focus on governance and development. In 2008, UNIOSIL was replaced by the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPISIL), which continued until 31 March 2014, further transitioning long-term peacebuilding responsibilities to the UN country team under the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

After over 15 years of UN-mandated peace operations in the country, Sierra Leone's post-exit period is often cited as a success story. The country held successive peaceful elections in 2007, 2012, and 2018, and achieved sustained GDP growth. This underscores how concerted international action can yield positive results. Yet challenges linked to the root causes of its decade-long civil war, the sustainability of security sector reform (SSR), and corruption persisted. Those difficulties underscored that a mission's exit does not guarantee complete peace consolidation – that it is only a phase in ongoing state building.

ONUB (Burundi)

Burundi's civil war (1993-2005) arose from entrenched Hutu-Tutsi ethnic divisions following decades of Tutsi-dominated rule. The Tutsi minority held most political positions post-independence including the upper echelons of the army. President Pierre Buyoya, a Tutsi, seized power in a coup and ruled from 1987-1993. In landmark elections in 1993, Melchior Ndadaye became both the first democratically elected and Hutu president, but was assassinated three months later by Tutsi-led soldiers. That event triggered massacres against Tutsis and a civil war that killed 50,000 to 100,000 people in its first year (Jennings, 2024). From 1994 to 1996, multi-ethnic governments failed to stabilise the country, and Buyoya took power once more in a coup in 1996. Multiple peace talks led to the 2000 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, which ushered in a three-year transitional power-sharing government. In December 2002, the main rebel group, CNDD-FDD, signed a ceasefire agreement with the transitional government.

The Security Council established the UN Operation in Burundi (ONUB) under Resolution 1545 in May 2004 (UNSC, 2004). Its mandate, commencing from 1 June 2004, was to support and help implement the 2000 Arusha agreement, monitor ceasefires and disarmament, and protect civilians and facilitate humanitarian access. ONUB comprised approximately 5,650 troops, 120 civilian police, 200 observers, 125 staff officers, and appropriate civilian personnel. It was authorised to use "all necessary means" to enforce its mandate.

By late 2006, disarmament and integration of ex-combatants, and steps toward elections, had progressed sufficiently for the Burundian government to request ONUB's withdrawal (UNSG 2006). Resolution 1692 in June 2006 extended ONUB to 31 December 2006, with BINUB (UN Integrated Office in Burundi) taking over on 1 January 2007 – focusing on governance, SSR, human rights, and measures to end impunity (UNSC 2006). Drawdown planning involved close consultation with Burundian authorities and the UN country team. BINUB continued with a lighter footprint from 2011, emphasising political dialogue and capacity building.

ONUB's exit coincided with Burundi's first post-conflict elections in 2005-2006, which were broadly peaceful. While initial stability held, later years saw serious backsliding on human rights and democratic norms. Nonetheless, the phased consultative exit, and integrated

follow-on office, provided a template for responsible transitions (IPI, 2012).

MINURCAT (Central African Republic/Chad)

The Darfur conflict, which began in 2003, quickly spilled into eastern Chad and north-eastern Central African Republic (CAR), generating over 249,000 refugees and displaced persons, frequent cross-border violence, and rebel incursions (Weir, 2010). In September 2007, the UN – through Resolution 1778 – authorised the multidimensional UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) for a period of one year. It comprised up to 5,200 military personnel, 300 police, 25 military liaison officers, and an appropriate number of civilian personnel.

MINURCAT's mandate included: protecting civilians, humanitarian workers, refugees, and displaced persons; facilitating returns of refugees and displaced persons; selecting, training, and advising the Chadian police (DIS); facilitating the provision of humanitarian assistance in eastern Chad and north-eastern CAR; and supporting reconstruction and socio-economic development of those areas.

In January 2010, the Chadian government declared it could secure its territory and requested MINURCAT's withdrawal. Resolution 1923 extended the mandate to year-end, setting a phased drawdown that included troop reductions by mid-July, and a complete exit by 31 December 2010. No dedicated successor mission was established. Following its withdrawal, the UN country team and the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA) maintained humanitarian and development efforts, while Chadian forces and regional bodies assumed security roles.

MINURCAT was a unique UN peacekeeping operation, devoted solely to the protection of civilians, without an explicit political mandate. It went through the stages of planning, deployment, and withdrawal in the short span of less than four years. Its drawdown left a notable security vacuum: banditry, attacks on refugees and aid workers, and judicial gaps re-emerged. The premature exit endangered humanitarian operations, human rights, security, and rule-of-law efforts (HRW, 2010) – highlighting the risks of entrusting protection solely to under-resourced national forces.

UNOCI (Côte d'Ivoire)

The UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) was created following a failed coup attempt against President Laurent Gbagbo in 2001, which triggered civil war. The country was split between a rebel-held north and government-controlled south. France made a controversial military intervention in 2002, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) also deployed peacekeepers.

Within this context, the Security Council established UNOCI in February 2004 through Resolution 1528 to monitor a ceasefire agreement, protect civilians, and facilitate disarmament and reconciliation. The Security Council transferred authority from an earlier political mission, the UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (MINUCI) to UNOCI, and renewed the mandate of MINUCI until April 2004. Mission strength grew from an initial 6,240 troops (UNSC, 2004) to over 11,000 uniformed personnel by mid-2013 (Novosseloff, 2018). Its tasks widened to encompass civilian protection, SSR, human rights monitoring, electoral assistance, and transitional justice.

In the wake of the contested 2010 presidential elections between Gbagbo and opposition leader Alassane Ouattara, UNOCI entered a second phase. The elections prompted a crisis that tested the mission's cooperation with French forces, the unity of the Security Council, the mission's cooperation with regional actors, and its capacity to deal with a sudden deterioration in the security situation. Ultimately, UNOCI adopted a robust approach, and the crisis was resolved following the arrest of Gbagbo by Ouattara's French-backed forces – an ouster in which UNOCI also played a role. With the ascension of Ouattara in 2011, UNOCI entered the third and final phase of its deployment. During this period it supported a democratically elected government that had gained power through violence (Novosseloff, 2018).

Following resolution of the 2010-2011 electoral crisis the mission began to drawdown in early 2013 (UN Secretary-General, 2013). In 2016, Resolution 2284 phased the withdrawal through to June 2017, leaving only key protective and advisory functions before a handover to the UN country team. The UN maintained that peaceful presidential elections in October 2015, and legislative elections in December 2016, were evidence of improvements in the security situation that would pave the way for long term peace and stability (UN, 2018). UNOCI's mandate pivoted to: protection of civilians; political support; support to security institutions and border-related challenges; support for compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law; humanitarian assistance; public information; and protection of UN personnel (UNSC, 2016).

There was no direct follow-on mission in place, so UNOCI handed over coordination of reconciliation and development efforts to the UN country team, supported by the Ivorian government and donors. UNOCI had helped lift Côte d'Ivoire out of its most serious crisis since independence. The power-sharing pact and SSR advanced under the mission laid the basis for national reconciliation. However, the lack of accountability for human rights abuses pointed to a wider failure to address a longstanding culture of impunity within the army (HRW, 2017) – a reminder that SSR and transitional justice require sustained attention beyond the departure of peacekeepers.

UNMIL (Liberia)

Liberia's second civil war (1999-2003) was a brutal continuation of unresolved issues and grievances from the first conflict (1989-1997), which had officially ended with the election of President Charles Taylor in 1997. But his rule quickly became characterised by authoritarianism, corruption, and the political exclusion of former rivals, laying the groundwork for renewed violence. By mid-2023, two rebel groups – Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) – were besieging the capital, Monrovia. Under immense international pressure, Taylor resigned in August 2003 and went into exile in Nigeria. West African peacekeepers (ECOMIL) arrived to secure Monrovia a week before Taylor's departure, and the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra.

The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), established under Resolution 1509 in September 2003, deployed the following month and absorbed the ECOMIL detachment. It succeeded the UN Office in Liberia (UNOL) and the earlier UN Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL). It reached its peak of 15,000 troops and 1,000 police personnel by 2006. UNMIL's mandate included supporting the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and peace process; protecting UN staff, facilities and civilians; and assisting with elections. With the successful conduct of elections in 2005, the Security Council shifted UNMIL's substantive mandate toward rehabilitating and reintegrating ex-combatants, SSR, judicial reform, human rights support, and the consolidation of state authority.

The mission also supported the disarmament of over 100,000 combatants and facilitated elections in 2005 and 2011. From 2015, Liberia's security forces assumed greater responsibility. Resolution 2333 (December 2016) set UNMIL's exit date as 30 April 2018 – after a 15-year deployment – with a comprehensive peacebuilding transition plan developed ahead of the mission's withdrawal.

(UNSC, 2017). As part of the plan, the UN's Resident Coordinator's Office was strengthened to ensure political capacities, and UNMIL's Deputy Special Representative took on the role of Resident Coordinator to ensure greater continuity. A separate Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 18 agencies and programmes were also set up to continue peacebuilding and development work throughout the country (UNSC, 2016).

The UN's involvement transitioned from UNMIL, to continued support through the UN country team focused on governance, justice reform, and economic recovery (UNSC, 2018). UNMIL's work, and its transition out of Liberia, are considered positive examples of how the UN can support countries through conflict and post-conflict phases (Roby, 2018). When President George Weah was inaugurated in January 2018, succeeding Ellen Johnson Sirleaf who had led Liberia since 2006, it was the first time in over 70 years that Liberia achieved a peaceful transfer to a democratically elected president (SCR, 2018). There was optimism that the country would turn the page on crisis and conflict, and achieve lasting stability, democracy and prosperity (UNSC, 2018). However, an economic downturn, and weak police and judicial systems, have highlighted the need for sustained institutional funding and capacity building (Rouse, 2019). Years after the mission officially closed, George Weah peacefully handed power to Joseph Boakai in 2023, underscoring the enduring legacy of UN peacekeeping in Liberia. The credibility of the electoral process and the absence of post-election violence reflect the resilience of institutions the mission helped build, particularly in electoral management. The country's history of violent transitions in the 1990s and early 2000s contrasts sharply with the stability demonstrated in 2023, strengthening the view of Liberia as one of the UN's most notable peacekeeping success stories.

UNAMID (Darfur)

Decades of neglect and exclusion set the stage for Darfur's descent into civil war (Cheadle/Prendergast, 2007). Since Sudan's independence in 1956, Khartoum's ruling elite had siphoned off mineral and agricultural wealth from peripheral regions, including Darfur, while failing to deliver basic services or political representation to both Arab and non-Arab communities. That fragile situation shattered in February 2003 when the Sudan Liberation Army under Minni Arkou Minawi (SLA/MM) attacked government outposts in the Jebel Marra, provoking a brutal counterinsurgency by Janjaweed militias, backed by President Omar al-Bashir's regime (Tubiana, 2023). Estimates of 400,000 killed and three million displaced prompted international outrage. The African Union (AU) deployed a small military and police force in October

2004 (AU, 2004) with a mandate that included the protection of internally displaced persons, and the UN Security Council referred Darfur to the International Criminal Court in March 2005. The Darfur Peace Agreement, brokered by the AU between Khartoum and the SLA/MM in May 2006, was intended as a first step toward reconciliation – but its serious flaws and the refusal of two other rebel delegations to sign stalled implementation and allowed insecurity to fester (ICG, 2006), prompting renewed calls for armed intervention.

Under Resolution 1769, the AU and UN authorised and mandated UNAMID, a joint operation for Darfur in July 2007 for an initial 12-month period (UNSC, 2007). This was the first (and so far, only) hybrid operation between the UN and a regional organisation – reflecting cross-organisational cooperation, command and control, and political synergy. Protection of civilians was at the core of UNAMID's mandate. However, it was also tasked with monitoring and verifying the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement, facilitating humanitarian assistance, supporting an inclusive political process, and monitoring and reporting on the situation along the borders with Chad and CAR.

At its inception, UNAMID was the largest peacekeeping mission ever deployed, with up to 25,987 uniformed personnel, police, and a large civilian component. It was gradually reduced to 19,248 members by 2016, and then rapidly contracted to 6,550 by June 2018 (Forti 2019).

Political shifts in Sudan, including rebel military setbacks and the lack of a comprehensive peace process – the central pillar of the mission's exit strategy – prompted the Security Council to initiate a phased drawdown in 2017. Resolution 2363 in 2017 extended UNAMID's mandate until 30 June 2018, and reduced the authorised troop ceiling to 11,395 and the police ceiling to 2,888 (UNSC, 2017). Resolution 2429 in 2018 mandated a further reduction in troop levels over the course of the renewal period to 4,050 troops and 2,500 police personnel (UNSC, 2018). UNAMID ended on 31 December 2020, after 13 years (UN Peacekeeping).

The UN's transition in Darfur was initially based on a rapid security drawdown and a reconfiguration to an expanded UN country team. However, its trajectory was complicated by Sudan's 2019 revolution that led to the ouster of al-Bashir in April 2019. This tested the UN and AU's ability to adapt the transition to changing conditions and led to a temporary pause in the mission's drawdown. Transition planning introduced State Liaison Functions – a joint UNAMID and UN Country Team initiative – to hand over tasks to UN agencies and Sudanese authorities, with full closure scheduled for 31 December 2020 and final liquidation by June 2021.

The UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) was established in June 2020 through Resolution 2524. Its goal was to support Sudan's transition to democratic rule through a range of political, peacebuilding, and development initiatives before and after UNAMID's exit (UNSC, 2020). While UNITAMS put in place useful civilian protection measures, the outbreak of civil war in 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces meant it was unable to complete its mandate.

UNAMID had succeeded in improving the overall security situation, reducing the number of armed confrontations between government forces and rebel groups, improving support to mediation between the government and armed movements, and providing protection through thousands of patrols to isolated and high-risk areas (UNSC, 2018). Its withdrawal created a security gap: ethnic clashes resumed, displacement surged, and militia looting of former UN bases deprived communities of infrastructure. The transition underscored the perils of exit without a comprehensive peace agreement and in the absence of effective local governance and security mechanisms.

MINUSMA (Mali)

The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was established in response to a crisis stemming from decades of weak institutions, poor governance, and the marginalisation of northern Mali. The crisis escalated in January 2012, when a Tuareg rebellion led by the MNLA, and joined by the jihadi groups Ansar Dine, AQIM, and MUJAO, quickly seized control of key northern regions. A coup in March 2012 resulted in the further weakening of state authority. ECOWAS mediation, led by Burkinabe President Blaise Compaoré, resulted in a framework agreement in April 2012. It included the stepping aside of the coup leaders, the resignation of President Amadou Toumani Touré, and the creation of an interim government. Under Resolution 2085, the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) and the UN Office in Mali (UNOM) were deployed to rebuild Mali's forces. But renewed insurgent advances in January 2013 led to French intervention under "Operation Serval", which restored state control in major northern towns.

However, persistent security challenges prompted the establishment of MINUSMA in April 2013 through Resolution 2100 (SRC 2013). The mission was mandated to: support Mali's political transition and governance reforms; stabilise major population centres and key supply routes; protect civilians and monitor human rights; facilitate humanitarian aid and displaced persons returns; and extend government authority and prepare for elections. The authorised mission strength was nearly 13,000 personnel – 11,200 military, 1,440 police – with a substantial civilian component concentrated in Gao, Sévaré, and the capital, Bamako.

From 2022, Malian authorities had already begun restricting the mission's freedom of movement and objecting to its human rights reporting (SCR 2023). Tense relations between the government and the mission – along with the deployment of the Russian private security firm Wagner in late 2021 – had already caused several troop-contributing countries to withdraw from MINUSMA. In June 2023, Mali's transitional government requested MINUSMA's departure, citing its inability to curb the violence. Bamako had rejected earlier alternative options for the reconfiguration of MINUSMA (Maeci, 2023). These had included increasing the mission's troop ceiling; consolidating its presence at current force levels; or the withdrawal of the peacekeeping force and its replacement with a UN special political mission. Without the host country's consent, the mission could no longer remain, in line with UN peacekeeping principles.

Resolution 2690 set a phased drawdown from 1 July to 31 December 2023, with liquidation through mid-2024 (UN, 2023). No comprehensive follow-on mission was adopted, although European Union military training and advisory missions remained engaged, alongside UN country-team development activities. The exit exposed a security gap exploited by jihadist groups and inter-communal militias. Wagner (replaced by the Africa Corps) has been unable to address that challenge – its activities instead have contributed to the currently expanding insecurity in northern and central Mali (HRW, 2024).

The rapid reassertion of non-state armed actors in northern and central Mali points to MINUSMA's success in stabilising the north – and the fragility of those gains. The experience of MINUSMA underscores the need for more realistic mandates, improved security arrangements, and a better understanding of the local context.

TABLE 1
Comparative Table of Peacekeeping Missions

Country	Mission Name	Conflict Context	Mandate Focus	Exit Strategy	Follow-on Arrangements	Post-Exit Outcomes
Sierra Leone	UNAMSIL	Civil war (1991–2002)	Ceasefire monitoring, DDR, protection, elections	Phased drawdown with benchmarks	UNIOSIL → UNIPSIL	Peaceful elections, GDP growth, persistent SSR and corruption issues
Burundi	ONUB	Ethnic civil war (1993–2005)	Support Arusha Agreement, ceasefire monitoring, protection	Phased exit with government request	BINUB → BNUB	Initial stability, later human rights backsliding
CAR/Chad	MINURCAT	Darfur spillover, refugee crisis	Protection of civilians, humanitarian aid, police training	Premature exit at host request	No successor mission	Security vacuum, resurgence of violence
Côte d'Ivoire	UNOCI	Civil war and electoral crisis	Ceasefire monitoring, SSR, elections, human rights	Phased drawdown post-election	UN country team	Improved stability, but impunity issues remain
Liberia	UNMIL	Civil wars (1989–2003)	Ceasefire, DDR, SSR, elections, human rights	Phased drawdown with transition plan	UN country team, OHCHR	Peaceful transitions, economic challenges
Sudan (Darfur)	UNAMID	Ethnic conflict, marginalization	Civilian protection, peace agreement monitoring	Phased drawdown with liaison functions	UNITAMS	Security gaps, resumed clashes, looting
Mali	MINUSMA	Tuareg rebellion, jihadist insurgency	Stabilization, governance, elections, protection	Phased drawdown at host request	UN country team, EU missions	Security vacuum, jihadist resurgence

Conclusion

Across these seven African missions, it is evident that a responsible peacekeeping exit requires careful coordination of security drawdowns with political, institutional, and development support. Phased and managed exits are crucial. Missions like UNAMSIL and ONUB – which set clear benchmarks and transitioned in stages to follow-on integrated offices – generally left stronger institutional frameworks than abrupt withdrawals. However, despite ONUB's transition to integrated UN offices (BINUB/BNUB), Burundi's post-2014 trajectory shows how elite politics can unravel peace settlements once international leverage recedes.

Additionally, host-nation capacity is pivotal. When UNMIL began its drawdown, the transfer of security responsibilities to the under-resourced Liberia National Police (LNP) and Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) exposed critical

capacity gaps that slowed recovery and left persistent security vacuums – indicating the handover was more symbolic than fully operative. The LNP, already plagued by weak infrastructure, logistical constraints, and challenges of corruption, was ill-prepared to maintain order independently (Forti and Connolly, 2018). The Ebola epidemic (2014–2015) exposed the LNP's and AFL's lack of crisis response depth. The UN's logistical, engineering and rapid-response capabilities were no longer available to backstop the national forces, highlighting an important lesson: transitions must extend support well after formal handover to prevent relapse.

Furthermore, political settlement underpins sustainable exit. In Darfur, UNAMID faced challenges due to the absence of a comprehensive and enforceable peace agreement involving rebel factions, marginalised communities, and provisions for power sharing. The Doha Docu-

ment for Peace in Darfur was only partially implemented, and non-signatory rebel groups continued to contest government control, resulting in UNAMID focusing on civilian protection and patrols rather than addressing underlying governance issues (Stimson Center, 2024). Similarly, in Mali, MINUSMA's mandate under the 2015 Algiers Peace Agreement encountered obstacles, with delays or stagnation in key political provisions such as decentralisation, power sharing, institutional reform, and justice (Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung, 2018). By 2019, many commitments were unmet and international mediation efforts had decreased (Carter Center, 2020). Political support weakened while security concerns grew, with jihadist groups taking advantage of governance gaps in central Mali and MINUSMA's resources facing increasing pressure and attacks. In both contexts, peacekeepers mainly served as interim stabilisers rather than facilitators of political settlements, and their eventual withdrawals were influenced by international fatigue

and host-state dissatisfaction rather than lasting political solutions.

Follow-on political missions are critical for sustaining progress. Integrated UN offices (like UNIOSIL, BINUB, UNITAMS) help maintain momentum in governance and human rights when peacekeepers depart, but their capacity and mandates must match context needs. Moreover, humanitarian and development ties must endure. Where UN country teams and humanitarian actors remained engaged after exit – such as in Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire – the transition to longer-term development aid helped consolidate peace. Finally, exit politics shape timing and manner. Host government requests (Chad, Mali) or Security Council politics (Liberia) can drive timelines that may not align with realities on the ground, underscoring the need for rigorous transition planning and contingency options.

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Conclusion

Evan Nachtrieb

While each chapter of this report offered diverse lessons for future missions, a common theme runs through them all: in a resource constrained environment, peace support operations must align their ends, ways, and means – in that order. PSOs must first establish what they aim to accomplish (ends), decide how to do it (ways), and match resources to carry out their plan (means). As the chapters illustrated, the increasingly combat oriented operations that African PSOs engage make the strategic endeavor difficult and increasingly deadly. Core to strategic logic is the primacy of the political ends, but in combat intensive operations, missions must balance both military and political means to succeed. Yet, this ideal flow from ends to mean is turned on its head by the unpredictability of funding to PSOs, a dynamic that pushes the discussion of means to the front.

This discussion of means is critical. Increasingly, interveners must organize missions around what they can fund, not what they want. Doing “less with less,” however, can be unacceptable in combat-oriented missions. By doing less, AUSSOM further exposes itself to attack from a deadly enemy and threatens Somalia with collapse. Without the additional troops and air support they needed, M23 overran SAMIDRC in the DRC, and killed 17. The AU’s inability to finance its operations and the contraction of the UN’s budget drive this structural constraint. As Staeger stated, the power of money is in how it shapes relationships. Resolution 2719 offers a way to build on the AU-UN relationship, fund smaller traditional peacekeeping operations, and strengthen the AU’s efforts to make missions more accountable. Yet if the continent ultimately wants to make its own decisions about security, it will need to find a way to pay for it.

Shifting attention to “ways” available to missions, contributors agreed that stabilization or peace enforcement requires forces up to the task. SADC’s poor performance in Mozambique and the DRC, as described by Sidumo and Wolters, was just as much the result of under-resourced militaries as under-resourced missions. Fred Bauma’s account of the fall of Goma highlights the challenge of coordination among flawed coalitions, a problem not unique to the DRC. Sidumo’s analysis of the Rwandan deployment to Mozambique shows the importance of translating combat performance into legitimacy with the aid of cultural skills, especially during counterinsurgency.

Debating the “ways” missions can accomplish their objectives should not be limited to force, because PSOs are not simply expeditionary wars. They seek to build a peace by empowering a host government or a peace process. Samira Gaid’s case of Somalia in-point, the chief goal is strengthening the host. While success in combat is a prerequisite for a peace enforcement or stabilization mission, it is not the end-all. Missions must carefully balance immediate security needs with the longer-term effort to build host capacity.

Means and ways themselves mean nothing if not directed toward a defined end. The earlier generation PSOs in Africa, exemplified by MONUSCO, MINSUSMA, and MINUSCA, included large and relatively well-resourced missions. Yet, as described by Sogodogo, MINUSMA eventually was driven out by fundamental disagreements with the host government about what ends the mission should strive to achieve. MINUSCA and MONUSCO have become the subject of political criticism as they continue to age while peace remains elusive.

The report cements the cliché (although often ignored) wisdom that ends must be clearly defined. Drawing from a wide survey, Kinkoh offers specific tools: a mission should set benchmarks for a military withdrawal and send follow-up political or development missions to strengthen the peace. Balancing this technical approach is Gaid’s reminder that capacity building is political as much as technical, especially in a fractured state such as Somalia. Matty Jaw’s example of ECOWAS in Gambia also stresses that even successful missions can sour without clear objectives, as success breeds mission creep.

Peace operations depend on resources, but also on using those resources wisely in the face of great challenges. The era of expansive, open-ended missions is ending. To remain a capable tool, PSOs must become more efficient with what they have. Thankfully, Africa’s experience in the struggle for peace provides a wealth of lessons; the challenge is applying them judiciously. As conflict spills across the Sahel, threatens to resume in the Horn, and smolders in the Great Lakes, the need for peace support missions that deliver is greater than ever.

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