Strengthening African Peace Support Operations: Nine Lessons for the Future of the African Standby Force

Walter Lotze

Over the last decade, African countries, with the support of international partners, have engaged in a collective effort to develop regional capacities for peace support operations. Under the umbrella of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), the African Union (AU), three Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and two Regional Mechanisms (RMs) have worked to develop the African Standby Force (ASF). Although the AU and the RECs/RMs are progressively displaying their willingness and enhanced capacity to deploy peace support operations, the appropriateness of the ASF concept is under scrutiny. In light of nine principal lessons learned over the last ten years, it would seem appropriate to adjust the ASF concept somewhat, and to make investments in the respective key areas.

The ASF, established in 2003, envisions the development of five regional standby capabilities for peace support operations, for which the RECs/RMs have primary responsibility[1]. These can then be made available to the AU when a deployment need arises, or can be deployed at regional level. As a result of these efforts, as well as of bilateral support to member states, there has been a steady improvement in African capacities to respond to crisis situations through the deployment of increasingly larger and complex peace support operations.

In 2013 African peace support operations capabilities were tested more than ever: the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was expanded, a joint AU-ECOWAS mission was launched in Mali (AFISMA), operations against the Lord's Resistance Army under the AU-authorised Regional Task Force (LRA RTF) continued, and the existing MICOPAX mission of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) in the Central African Republic was re-hatted into a joint AU-ECCAS operation (AFISM-CAR[2]).

In total, 40,641 uniformed and civilian personnel were mandated to serve in AU peace support operations and an additional 30,424 in the joint AU-UN mission in Darfur (UNAMID). This is a record high since the establishment of the AU and the ASF.

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[1] RECs: Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Southern African Development Community (SADC). RMs: Eastern African Standby Force Coordinating Mechanism (EASFCOM) and North African Regional Capability (NARC).

[2] AFISM-CAR is synonymous with MISCA (Mission internationale de soutien à la Centrafrique), the acronym used in the relevant UN resolutions.

AU-Mandated Deployments in 2013	
Somalia (AMISOM)	22,126 uniformed / 70 civilian
Mali (AFISMA)	9,620 uniformed / 173 civilian
Central African Republic (AFISM-CAR)	3,500 uniformed / 152 civilian
LRA Regional Task Force	5,000 uniformed
AU-UN hybrid mission Darfur (UNAMID)	*25,987 uniformed / 4,437 civilian*
TOTAL AU/RECs/RMs *incl. UNAMID*	**40,246 uniformed / 395 civilians** *66,233 uniformed / 4,832 civilians*

A decade into the development of the ASF, AU member states in January 2013 called for a comprehensive progress review. And in recognition of some of the deployment challenges faced (especially financial and logistical), AU member states in May 2013 called for the development of an African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC), as a temporary mechanism until the ASF becomes fully operational.

This call for the ACIRC may be representative of the frustrations that have accompanied the development of the ASF to date, and of the desire of African states to play a greater role in crisis management on the continent. However, the development of a temporary, mostly military, intervention mechanism would not in and of itself address the underlying challenges encountered to date. Rather, focus should be placed on adjusting the ASF concept and on investing in key areas based on the successes achieved and challenges encountered so far.

The Evolving African Role

Although the development of the ASF has often been criticised as being slow, four major achievements should be noted:

1. African states have demonstrated that they are willing to mandate the deployment of peace support operations into extremely complex and volatile conflict situations. In 2013 two new operations were mandated (to Mali and the CAR), and an existing operation was reinforced (Somalia) as part of international efforts in these countries.

2. Multilateral (including AU, REC/RM, UN and EU) planning and decision-making processes for multi-dimensional peace support operations have increasingly become the norm. On the basis of past experience, future deployments on the continent will likely take place in the context of joint planning and decision-making processes, whatever their weaknesses, at the sub-regional and regional levels, in which organisations such as the EU and the UN are also involved.

3. Despite numerous political hurdles, and although there remains much room for improvement, the AU and the RECs/RMs are slowly learning to work together in the formulation of joint responses to crisis situations, and to jointly plan and manage peace support operations.

Contributors to AU-Mandated Operations	
AMISOM	Burundi, Djibouti, Kenya, Uganda, Sierra Leone. Nigeria was a major Police Contributing Country.
AFISMA	Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo
AFISM-CAR	To be determined
LRA RTF	Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Uganda
UNAMID	Burkina Faso, Burundi, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia

4. More and more African countries are willing and capable to deploy their personnel to both African-led peace support operations and UN peacekeeping operations. In 2010, the AU was struggling to find Troop and Police Contributing Countries to join Burundi and Uganda in AMISOM. Just three years later, the Lord's Resistance Army Regional Task Force (LRA RTF) had four, AMISOM five and AFISMA 13 troop contributing countries, and contributors were being lined up for the new mission in the CAR. In addition, African contributions to UN peacekeeping operations have steadily increased from little over 10,000 per annum in 2003 to approximately 35,000 per annum by 2013. Combined, this has led to the highest number of African contributions to operations in Africa to date in little over a decade since the inception of the ASF.

Nine Lessons Learned

Nine major lessons of the past decade can inform the future development of the ASF:

Lesson 1   Recognizing deployment politics

The ASF concept has contributed to the *development* of African capabilities for peace support operations, but it has been less useful in terms of *deploying* these capabilities. The strength of the ASF concept lies in setting common standards for the identification, training and retention of capabilities at the national level which can be deployed when required. The ASF concept has also led to the development of multidimensional planning capabilities at the level of the AU Commission and the REC/RM planning elements. However, actual deployments have relied on lead states and coalitions of the willing. The mission in Burundi (2003 – 2004) was mostly undertaken by a single lead state, all subsequent missions by coalitions of willing member states, often also involving lead states at critical times. As in other multilateral deployment contexts, the willingness of member states to contribute to a particular operation will always be based on considerations of national interest and the prevailing political climate. The AU and the RECs/RMs will therefore have to deploy missions using what resources are available at the time, and probably not on the basis of a readily-deployable force from a particular region that can be deployed as a coherent entity.

Lesson 2   Adjusting the planning scenarios

The deployment scenarios for the ASF need to be re-examined. In 2003, six scenarios were envisaged, based on the conflict dynamics on the continent in the 1990s. These ranged from observer missions through to the rapid deployment of an intervention force in response to grave circumstances. However, at present the continent finds itself grappling with international terror networks, organised criminal networks that subvert state authority, piracy, coups, state repression, or humanitarian disasters. Finding the appropriate operational responses to complex situations, such as in Somalia or Mali, proved extremely challenging. More attention will need to be paid to the types of capabilities needed in relation to the threat agendas being faced.

Lesson 3   Strengthening AU-REC/RM relations

The relationship between the AU and the RECs/RMs needs to be strengthened. It is likely that the future deployment of peace support operations will see the AU and the regions having to work more closely together, both when developing political and operational responses to crisis situations. Under the ASF concept, peace support operation capabilities reside with the RECs/RMS, and are made available to the AU when a deployment need arises. The reality is that capabilities firmly reside with member states, and RECs/RMs and the AU will have to find better ways of working together to access them when required.

Lesson 4   Institutionalizing flexibility

A more structured concept of burden-sharing needs to be elaborated between African states, the regions, the AU, and partners such as the EU and the UN. While the response to a particular conflict will always be shaped by the political realities, more attention can be given to establishing frameworks that provide a sense of predictability to all actors involved. The AU and the RECs/RMs often have political legitimacy, the advantages of proximity and access to African capabilities. Partners bring funding, experience and logistical capabilities, as well as political leverage in specific cases. All of these comparative advantages have come to play in various forms in support for African peace support operations to date, but largely on an ad hoc basis. Greater attention should be given to understanding how effective collaboration could be attained, and to developing mechanisms of coordination that can be activated if need be.

Lesson 5   Strengthening multi-dimensionality

Multi-dimensionality is key to success. Early missions tended to be comprised mostly of military personnel while political processes were largely managed by separate special envoys or representatives. In recent times, the AU has appointed Special Representatives of the Chairperson of the Commission (SRCCs) to head multidimensional operations comprising civilian, police and military personnel, tasked simultaneously with leading the political engagement in-country. This alignment of political and security processes has yielded greater results and is now being imitated at the regional levels.

Lesson 6 **Improving joint planning**

Proper planning has been a key challenge. On numerous occasions the UN Security Council rejected AU plans to deploy a mission, due to gaps in planning and insufficient information. And indeed, the planning processes for African peace support operations have often been undertaken ad hoc, at times in an uncoordinated fashion. Yet on those occasions where planning processes brought together the various Departments and Divisions within the Commission, the AU and the RECs/RMs, or where they have been undertaken jointly with the UN, some of the best results have been attained. The most recent planning initiatives between the AU and the UN on Somalia or the joint planning between ECOWAS and the AU on Mali bear testament to this, and serve as models for the future. If better results are to be achieved, the planning capacities which are available at the AU and the RECs/RMs will have to be reinforced, and member states and partners will have to invest more in strengthening the role of the strategic headquarters in Addis Ababa and the planning elements in the regions.

Lesson 7 **Spelling out command and control**

Effective command and control of operations underpins both success and credibility, yet this is one of the areas in which room for improvement exists. More can be done to strengthen the role of the headquarters in providing strategic guidance and support, and the mission command and control structures in relation to the conduct of operations, to ensure that operations are managed effectively.

Lesson 8 **Upgrading mission support**

Efficient logistics systems are essential to operational effectiveness, yet they are severely lacking. This has made African missions entirely reliant on the support of other actors, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) for airlift, the United States for the contracting of logistical service providers, or the UN for comprehensive support packages as in the case of Somalia. While significant logistical capability resides within African member states (e.g. Algeria, Angola, Egypt and South Africa) this has not been tapped into. Attention also needs to be given to a support model that relies on the outsourcing of service delivery, as the UN has done. These issues will have to be addressed if African peace support operations are to be deployed independent of the goodwill of others.

Lesson 9 **Securing predictable funding**

Funding constraints have impacted on every African operation to date. The most significant funding mechanisms remain the AU Africa Peace Facility, designed to mobilise contributions from AU member states, and the EU Africa Peace Facility, which has channelled over a billion Euro in support of African peace support operations to date. While these have been vital, it is broadly agreed that the results have been less than satisfactory. The AU APF remains devoid of the kind of funding required for peace missions, and member states remain unwilling to fund the operations they mandate. The EU APF has performed well, however, funding volumes consistently had to be increased, and funding peace and security initiatives through the European Development Fund (EDF) appears to be increasingly untenable in the European context. New modes of cooperation, and financial mechanisms that provide the required levels of financial predictability, will need to be established.

Conclusion

During the last decade the AU and the RECs/RMs have emerged as important actors in the deployment of peace support operations on the continent. To make better use of the capacity which has been developed, and to continue to strengthen this role, it would be appropriate to adjust the ASF concept, and to make investments along the lines of the nine lessons highlighted above.

Dr. Walter Lotze was a guest researcher at ZIF in 2013. Before that, he served as a Planning and Liaison Officer for the AU Commission.