In Defense of Regional Peace Operations in Africa
By Benedikt F. Franke

It has been almost 12 years since French President Francois Mitterrand vigorously called for Africans “to resolve their conflicts themselves and organise their own security”. Ever since then, sceptics such as Walter Dorn have, equally vigorously, argued against the practicability of regionalising peace operations, that is, employing regional or sub-regional organisations to conduct operations reaching from low intensity peacekeeping to high intensity peace enforcement. Especially the continuing presence of violent conflicts and resultant humanitarian tragedies in large parts of the world combined with the United Nations’ still insufficient capabilities to address more than a few of these cases other than rhetorically merits a new close look at this idea of regionalising peace operations. It also leads the author to respectfully disagree with the arguments advanced by Dorn and other regiosceptics. In light of the recent interventions by regional and sub-regional organisations in Burundi, Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia and Sudan, the transformation of the defunct Organisation of African Unity (OAU) into a more promising African Union (AU) as well as the various international programs aimed at developing regional capabilities, this article argues that, at least in Africa, the delegation of some aspects of peace operations to such organisations cannot longer be considered unfeasible, or in fact, undesirable. Instead, its most important conclusion is that the exemplary willingness and increasing capacity of Africa’s regional organisations to step up to the continent’s manifold security challenges coupled with the UN’s current overstretch as well as the notable absence of many of the problems foreseen by the “regiosceptics” bodes well for the future of regional peace operations in Africa.

Though this paper directly challenges the current Afro-pessimism by highlighting the ability of regional and sub-regional organisations in Africa to make a meaningful contribution to continental and thus global peace and security, it nonetheless agrees with the regiosceptics in as much as regional peace operations should not been seen as an alternative to sustained peacekeeping missions led by the UN. However, it does so not because regional peacekeeping “generally is a bad idea”, but because the underlying idea of geographically internalising responsibility for peace operations never was intended as a real alternative to traditional UN missions in the first place. To maintain otherwise would be to misinterpret Chapter VIII of the UN Charter and to ignore the inherent institutional shortcomings and limitations of regional institutions. Instead, the idea of regionalising such responsibility must be understood as an emancipative and complementary rather than a supplementary effort, enabling the international community to more quickly address more conflicts in a more comprehensive manner by building on the strengths and compensating for the weaknesses of both types of organisation. A division of labour, wherein the regional organisation provides the military muscle for the initial enforcement and pacification mission while the UN concentrates on its comparative advantage in peace-building, post-conflict reconstruction and humanitarian relief.

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2 French President Francois Mitterrand as quoted in The Washington Post, Nov. 10, 1994
3 Dorn, Walter (1998), Regional Peacekeeping is not the Way, Peacekeeping and International Relations, Vol. 27, No. 2.
5 For the purpose of this paper “peace operations” includes everything from low intensity peacekeeping operations, such as military observer duty, to high intensity peace enforcement operations.
6 Dorn, Walter, 1998: 1
before taking over full responsibility, has already proven its feasibility and worth during the most recent international interventions in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. A similar arrangement is also planned for the ongoing AU mission in Darfur. Naturally, this is not to argue that this should set a precedent and that such division of labour should become standard operating procedure or, in fact, presents the ultimate solution to the world’s peacekeeping conundrum, but merely that a participation of regional organisations can occasionally ease the UN’s heavy burden in times when its resources are thin-stretched and the willingness of some of its members to intervene far away seemingly diminished.

To reach its conclusions, the paper is structured into three parts: First, it discusses the underlying idea of regionalising peace operations as well as the five most potent arguments commonly advanced against them. Second, it contends that the recent surge in relatively effective regional peace operations in Africa as well as the ongoing development of a promising African security architecture provide enough empirical evidence to successfully challenge these arguments. The remaining part of this paper assesses the prospects for a further regionalisation of peace operations in Africa and briefly elaborates on the challenges ahead. The paper concludes by arguing that, viewed against the backdrop of acute and anticipated conflict in Africa and many other parts of the world, a continuation of the academic and political debate on as well as material and financial support for the idea of regional peace operations remains a practical and moral imperative.

**Regioscepticism and its arguments**

The regionalisation of peace operations responsibility is not a new idea. On the contrary, Articles 52 and 53 of Chapter VII of the UN Charter, signed on 26 June 1945, already envisioned a noteworthy role for regional arrangements in the pacific settlement of local disputes as well as in enforcement action under the authority of the Security Council. While the bipolarity of the Cold War and the concomitant break-up of the world’s regions into fragmented spheres of influence hindered an effective regionalisation of peace operations responsibility, the dramatic surge in ever more complex UN peace operations following the advent of the “new global order” quickly reignited interest in the concept of burden-sharing. As early as 1992, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s *Agenda for Peace* reaffirmed “regional actions as a matter of decentralizations, delegations and cooperation with United Nations efforts as means of easing the burden on the Council”. In his 1995 report on *Improving Preparedness for Conflict Prevention and Peace-keeping in Africa*, the Secretary-General was even more specific:

> The founders of the United Nations, in Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, envisaged an important role for regional organizations in the maintenance of international peace and security. It is increasingly apparent that the United Nations cannot address every potential and actual conflict troubling the world. Regional or sub-regional organizations sometimes have a comparative advantage in taking the lead role in the prevention and settlement of conflicts and to assist the United Nations in containing them.

Besides this burden-sharing argument, the rationale behind a regional approach to conflict management is said to be the actors’ familiarity with the problems at hand as well as their cultural, social and historical affinity with each other and the parties to the conflict. While on first thought such familiarity and affinity may seem an obvious advantage, regiosceptics maintain that it is exactly this intimate connection to the region and its actors with its effect on impartiality that is one of the five disadvantages associated with regional peace operation

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arrangements, the other four being negative regional power perceptions, the resource and capacity constraints of regional organisations, the latter’s lack of authoritative legitimacy as well as the institutional weakening of the United Nations. Each of these arguments deserves to be discussed in more detail, before being challenged in the second part of this paper.

While it is generally acknowledged that regional organisations’ geographical proximity can, at least in theory, facilitate more rapid and less expensive responses to violent conflict than is possible through the UN and that their cultural proximity “provides them with a better understanding of a conflict’s dynamics, key players and context-specific management and resolution options”, regiosceptics maintain that geographical and cultural proximities are not always necessarily positively contributing assets.\(^\text{10}\) They instead note that “proximity generates tension and undermines the spirit of impartiality between neighbours” and that, therefore, regional actors all too often contribute to the complication of the situation at hand by being part of the problem and not part of the solution.\(^\text{11}\) They also doubt the motives of regional actors, who, they argue, tend to see conflicts in their region through “the coloured glasses of narrow national self-interest” and are thus likely to be confronted with an incompatibility of interests leading them to put their own political and military gain before a lasting resolution of the conflict.\(^\text{12}\) Usually, the Nigerian participation in and leadership of the ECOMOG (ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group) intervention in Liberia in 1990 is used as an example of a regional operation being manipulated by one country to serve its own national interests. However, the example of the “African scramble for Africa” where several countries joined “networks of plunder” during the recent civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo rather than contributing to a solution to the conflict is also often referred to.\(^\text{13}\) Naturally, the legacy of such behaviour undermines the credibility and perceived neutrality of regional operations.

The regiosceptics argue that this credibility and neutrality may be further undermined by the existence of a regional hegemon such as Nigeria or South Africa.\(^\text{14}\) Although these two states provide their respective regions with the resources, capacity and political legitimacy necessary to execute a regional response to conflict, the dependency of ECOWAS and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on a regional hegemon are the source of great discomfort to these organisations. It may mean not only that their peace and security agendas are being shaped by the domestic problems and national interests of these powerful states rather than the collective will of their members, but also that they will have substantial difficulties in responding to conflicts in which the dominant state is party to the conflict.\(^\text{15}\)

Another often-cited example is Nigeria’s questionable 1997 intervention in Sierra Leone. Wishing to support the democratically elected but weak Kabbah government in its fight against the rebels of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), Nigeria sidestepped the formal ECOWAS security framework and presented the organisation with a \textit{fait accompli} when it intervened with 900 troops attached to ECOMOG. This happened without prior consultations. Although Nigeria claimed to have merely spearheaded a multinational intervention, formal ECOWAS authorisation was only granted three months after Nigeria had actually entered Sierra Leone and many smaller ECOWAS member states feared that Nigeria

\(^{10}\) Powell, Kristiana (2005), \textit{The African Union’s emerging peace and security regime – opportunities and challenges for delivering on the responsibility to protect}, ISS Monograph Series, No. 119, pg. 20.


\(^{13}\) Dorn, Walter, 1998: 1-2

\(^{14}\) Adebajo, A. (2003), \textit{South Africa and Nigeria as regional hegemons} in Baregu and Landsberg (eds), \textit{From Cape to Congo: Southern Africa’s evolving security challenges}, Lynne Riener, Boulder.
had set a deleterious precedent by “hijacking ECOMOG and making the force an instrument of Nigerian domination”.  

A third argument raised against the regionalisation of peace operations is that, according to many regiosceptics, “no existing [African] regional organisation has the necessary capacity or experience” to commit meaningfully to conflict prevention and resolution through military means without outside assistance.  

They maintain that the continent’s regional and sub-regional organisations suffer from enormous resource and capacity constraints in the areas of training, interoperability, sustained readiness, transportation and logistics as well as funding which will continue to thwart effective action for the foreseeable future. Given that these resource and capacity constraints are directly related to the meagre military capabilities of the organisations’ member states and their dire economic situations, the regiosceptics also doubt the potential for substantial improvements in the short-term. In particular, the list of core military deficiencies is as long as it is disheartening. According to a study by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and the Institute for Security Studies:

> Few African countries are capable of deploying a battalion or more for peace operations without significant assistance. In addition, most do not possess specialised units with sufficient equipment or expertise to provide such necessary services as engineering, communications, medical or movement control. [...] With few exceptions, African countries cannot project force great distances. [...] It has even proven difficult for African countries to deploy with the desired level of self-sufficiency. 

Another study, this time by the German Institute for International Politics and Security, documents the African militaries’ massive weaknesses in command and control, intelligence gathering and analysis as well as doctrinal preparation. As several regiosceptics have noted, these weaknesses leave African militaries no choice but to return to outdated modes of warfare where “the combatants use the weaponry of the Korean war, the tactics of the first world war and the medical treatments of the 19th century”.

Besides these structural shortcomings, most African militaries are also plagued by a notable absence of military professionalism manifested in ever-recurring instances of corruption, ill-discipline and lack of esprit de corps. Given all these operational deficiencies, it is hardly surprising that several all-African interventions have failed to attain their objectives and some have arguably even exacerbated or widened the very conflicts they were meant to resolve. Naturally, the regiosceptics have not failed to use these failures and the fact that regional organisations remain wholly dependent on foreign military, technical, logistical and financial assistance to relativise the burgeoning enthusiasm of these organisations to become involved in continental conflict management. They argue, and not unreasonably so, that the willingness to intervene must be paralleled with the capacity to do so.

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18 Berman, E. and Sams, K., 2000: 384
21 Berman, E. and Sams, K., 2000: 120
22 Berman, E. and Sams, K., 2000: 7
The two last objections to the conduct of peace operations by regional organisations are closely related and center on the unique role of the United Nations in establishing and maintaining global peace and order. While the first objection cautions that regional organisations lack the moral and legal authority of the UN, the second warns that an increased focus on regional organisations breeds the danger of siphoning off some of the attention, resources and finances for important UN initiatives. Both objections are based on the premise that “there is no substitute for global action by a global organisation” and that delegating away the responsibility to protect which the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) had so meticulously placed upon the shoulders of the UN Security Council potentially opens up the door to a proliferation of undesirable interventions motivated by regional power politics instead of humanitarian concern.24

Possible answers to regioscepticism – the case of Africa

Having now briefly presented the five main arguments against the regionalisation of peace operations, this paper will go on to challenge each on either the grounds of empirical evidence or the fact that, however justified the respective objection may be in theoretical isolation, it does not apply to the realities of regionalisation in Africa. Moreover, the paper will argue that, given the inherent and universally acknowledged limitations of regional and sub-regional organisations as well as the recognised leadership role of the UN, the last two objections are particularly unjustified.

While it may be true that the historic evidence shows that during the 1990s Africa’s regional actors tended to see conflicts in their region through “the coloured glasses of narrow national self-interest” and more often intervened for national than for humanitarian reasons, there are a number of theoretical and practical problems with employing this as an argument against the conduct of regional peace operations in the future.25 First, a motivation to intervene arising from “narrow national self-interest” and not pure altruism must not always be judged negatively. To be more specific, there seems hardly anything wrong with intervening for reasons of national interest as long as this is legitimate (that is, non-criminal), benefits the large majority of people on the ground (no intervention will ever benefit everyone) and is geared towards a lasting resolution of the conflict at hand. This is not to say that a common end, that is the restoration of peace, necessarily legitimises everyone’s underlying motivation or all means of achieving that end, but only that national interests need not to be narrowly thought of as springing exclusively from resource greed or military ambition. Given the potentially devastating social and economical spill-over effects of violent conflict such as the massive influx of refugees, political unrest or the spread of contagious diseases, it may very well be in the national interest of a conflict-neighbouring state to join a regional intervention in order to prevent or at least mitigate such spill-over effects by ending the conflict. There is nothing wrong in that. On the contrary, by having a greater stake in the resolution of the conflict such countries are likely to be more determined, exhibit greater staying power and accept occasional humiliation more easily than a neutral and more distant outsider.26 A comparison of the effects of the US body bag syndrome on the intervention in Somalia with the way the states of West Africa stayed the course in Liberia despite taking heavy casualties seems to validate this line of thought, or as the former ECOMOG Force Commander Victor Malu observed concerning Liberia:

Regional peacekeeping I think is much more effective than the United Nations peacekeeping, in terms of the casualties that have occurred within the seven years

25 Dorn, Walter, 1998: 1
of peacekeeping here. If the United Nations had got one-tenth of that they would have abandoned this place over how many years back.  

Moreover, it would also seem that, for the very same reason, political will to intervene was easier to muster among regional actors if and when the need arises than among the wider international community.  

As regional interventions should be judged in the context of the international community’s decreasing willingness to intervene, these advantages make it difficult to understand why regional organisations should, therefore, not be relied upon more in managing peace and security on the continent. This is especially so as the last decade has seen Africans develop a genuine desire to take on greater responsibility for their continent’s troubles and foster the political will and institutional clout to match this desire. The general sentiment seems well summed up by the AU’s Commissioner for Peace and Security, Ambassador Said Djinnit:

> No more, never again. Africans cannot [...] watch the tragedies developing in the continent and say it is the UN’s responsibility or somebody else’s responsibility. We have moved from the concept of non-interference to non-indifference. We cannot as Africans remain indifferent to the tragedy of our people.

This determination to contribute to continental conflict management is further enhanced by a growing feeling of disappointment and distrust in the international community and its motives, capabilities and willingness to get involved in African affairs. While the feeling of disappointment is a direct result of the international community’s disastrous track record in Africa (with Rwanda and Darfur being the most glaring but far from the only casualties), the feeling of distrust springs from the recognition that Africa’s infant regionalisation has been accompanied by an altered outside perception of its growing significance to international politics. In fact, it seems that given the two global phenomena of terrorism and resource scarcity far more instrumentalist attention is being paid to Africa now than at the end of the 1980s, after the end of the Cold War and the onset of the uni-polar world. As Stephan Klingebiel has so aptly pointed out, this attention is concerned, in many respects, not with peace and security per se, but with threats faced by third parties (especially, but not exclusively, the United States and Europe) as well as their concrete interests such as energy supply, migration and matters of national security. Although most of these interests including the desire to prevent fragile or failed states turning into terrorist sanctuaries may appear legitimate and generally non-threatening, many Africans seem to fear the advent of a fourth scramble for Africa. Consequently, it should not come as a surprise that a conference study conducted by the Fund for Peace showed as early as 2001 that many Africans not only would prefer that intervening troops come from their own region, but also that they put more trust into the ability and willingness of sub-regional organisations such as ECOWAS to intervene on

31 Klingebiel, Stephan, 2005a: 39; Not surprisingly, the latter have featured especially prominently in the considerations of the United States to re-engage in Africa’s destiny. In the words of US Representative Edward Royce: “With the development of terrorist sanctuaries in Africa we have an increasing stake in the continent’s peace and its stability”. Royce, Edward R., 2004, Opening Statement, Hearing on Peacekeeping in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on Africa, Committee on International Relations (Friday, October 8, 2004), pg. 1.
32 The first scramble for Africa having been the colonisation, the second arising from the independence movements throughout the 1950s and early 60s and the third being associated with the various attempts of the Cold War superpowers to carve out spheres of influence for themselves.
their behalf than they put in the UN.\textsuperscript{33} Naturally, such a shift to regionalism cannot be explained merely by a fear of neo-imperialism or the recognition that the wider international community cannot summon the political will and/or the financial or operational capabilities to respond meaningfully to armed conflict in Africa, but must also rest on an expressed confidence in the potential of regional organisations to make a difference.

Indeed, African regional and sub-regional organisations have made noticeable strides over the past decade in reforming their institutional capacity and assuming primary responsibility for promoting peace and security. In July 2002, leaders from 53 African nations (that is, all African nations but Morocco) decided to replace the Organisation of African Unity which had been marked by a largely unsatisfactory record in the field of peace and security with a structurally more promising African Union modelled after the European archetype.\textsuperscript{34} At its first session the assembly of the AU established a Peace and Security Council (PSC) as a standing decision-making organ including “a collective security and early-warning arrangement to facilitate timely and efficient response to conflict and crisis situations in Africa”.\textsuperscript{35} This Council is supported by the Commission of the AU, a Panel of the Wise, a Continental Early Warning System, an African Standby Force and a Special Fund.\textsuperscript{36}

While the creation of this arrangement in itself constitutes a major achievement in institutional reform, it is the AU’s underlying acceptance of the normative commitment to protect which distinguishes it from its feeble predecessor. Where Articles II and III of the OAU’s Charter had placed a premium on sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in member states’ internal affairs, the AU’s Constitutive Act, like the ICISS’s report \textit{The Responsibility to Protect}, imposes important limitations on state sovereignty.\textsuperscript{37} A member state will thereby continue to enjoy the privileges of sovereignty such as the non-interference of its fellow member states in its internal affairs only as long as it fulfils its responsibility to protect its citizens.\textsuperscript{38} If, however, it fails, for whatever reasons, to honour this responsibility, the AU reserves itself “the right to intervene [in a member state] pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity”.\textsuperscript{39}

By defining sovereignty in the conditional terms of a state’s capacity and willingness to protect its citizens, the AU’s Constitutive Act is the first international treaty to recognise the right of an organisation to militarily intervene in its member states’ affairs.\textsuperscript{40} It thereby not only takes the idea of collective security to a new level, but also provides the AU with a powerful foundation on which to anchor its emerging conflict management mechanism. Given the continent’s other positive institutional developments such as the establishment of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development and the African Peer Review Mechanism (discussed further below) or the signing of a Framework for a Common African Defence and Security

\begin{itemize}
\item Klingebiel, Stephan, 2005a: 2
\item African Union, The Constitutive Act of the African Union, Article 4 (Principles), paragraph “h”.
\item Powell, Kristiana, 2005: 1
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Policy (CADSP), this mechanism constitutes “a realistic African reform program” and a first step towards providing “African solutions to African problems”.\(^{41}\)

It is hardly disputable that the political will and determination of Africa’s regional organisations to get this far necessarily arose out of their geographical and cultural proximity to many of the world’s current conflicts. In addition, the advantages of being close to a conflict such as superior speed, understanding and often resolve arguably outweigh its disadvantages such as the possible prominence of condemnable national interests over humanitarian concerns. So it seems to the author that a regional organisation’s proximity to conflict should no longer be regarded a sufficient argument against its potential effectiveness. This is especially so as the wider international community has quite obviously failed to offer itself as an attractive alternative to increased regionalisation in the area of peace operations.

Nonetheless, the concern that a regional organisation may fall prey to domination by a regional hegemon remains a legitimate one. However, it seems that in the case of Africa the risk of such counterproductive hegemony developing is notably smaller than, for example, in Asia or South America. Francis Kornegay and Simon Chesterman have pointed out that while South Africa and Nigeria do possess attributes that can make them militarily and politically dominant relative to other sub-regional states, their ability to act as regional hegemons is constrained by several factors.\(^{42}\) They argue that both a *Pax Pretoriana* as well as a *Pax Nigeriana* would have to stand up to a number of countries which have the capacity to increase significantly the costs to any hegemonic ambitions Pretoria and Abuja might harbour in their respective sub-regions. In the case of South Africa such “bargainers” could include Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola, while Nigeria would have to contend with Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal and Burkina Faso. Furthermore, they argue that Africans see South Africa and Nigeria as indispensable to any credible efforts at building a regional security mechanism and have consequently begun to devise ways to hold the two powers accountable within a multilateral setting.\(^{43}\) The aforementioned establishment of an African Peer Review Mechanism testifies to the success of this approach which relies on peer pressure to ensure that sub-regional hegemons such as South Africa or Nigeria serve as “pillars” rather than “hammers” and adhere to the principles of peace, good governance and democracy.\(^{44}\)

The argument raised against the regionalisation of peace operations in Africa on grounds of the relevant organisations’ insufficient operational capacities and experience is, without doubt, the most difficult to refute. In fact, given the glaring military shortcomings of most African countries it seems pointless trying to blandish their capabilities for regional peace operations. However, there are a number of points to be made.

First, while it is certainly true that African organisations essentially lack the ability to intervene anywhere without outside assistance such as the provision of strategic lift and material, technical as well as financial support, international military aid and training programmes designed to remedy these shortcomings have increasingly moved into the focus of public attention. The foremost initiative in this respect is the G8’s Africa Action Plan and the associated Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative (GPOI) which provides support for


\(^{43}\) The argument is based on a discussion held during a seminar which featured about 65 military, diplomatic, civil society and academic participants mostly from Southern Africa, 11-13 December 2000, Gaborone, Botswana. Kornegay, Francis and Chesterman, Simon, 2000: 13.

\(^{44}\) Kornegay, Francis and Chesterman, Simon, 2000: 14
African capacities to prevent and resolve armed conflict on the continent. As part of it, the G8 commits itself to providing technical and financial assistance so that, by 2010, African countries and regional and sub-regional organisations are able to engage more effectively to prevent and resolve violent conflict and undertake peace support operations in accordance with the United Nations Charter. The goal is to improve capacity for peace operations through three proposals, namely, the coordination and enhancement of training troops for peace operations, the establishment of a constabulary police training center and the development of a deployment logistics support arrangement. Other similar initiatives include the United States’ Africa Contingency Operations Training Assistance (ACOTA), the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) and the Enhanced International Peacekeeping Capabilities (EIPC) program, the French program Renforcement des Capacités Africaines de Maintien de la Paix (RECAMP) as well as the United Kingdom’s various military training and peace support teams. In connection with the EU-funded African Peace Facility (worth €250 million) these initiatives certainly have the potential to rectify many of the military and institutional shortcomings of Africa’s regional organisations in the foreseeable future (that is, years not decades). In fact, their effectiveness has already been clearly visible in the considerable qualitative differences between the first ECOMOG intervention in Liberia in 1990 and the more recent (2003) ECOWAS operation in the same country. While the former was plagued by “persistent operational difficulties”, the latter proved a surprisingly successful humanitarian intervention, especially given the difficult security situation in post-Taylor Liberia.

Second, in line with President Mbeki’s call for “Africans to do everything [they] can to rely on their own capacities to secure their continent’s renaissance”, African organisations themselves are also actively trying to augment their capabilities for conflict management. For example, the AU’s aforementioned Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council, adopted in July 2002, provides for the establishment of a Military Staff Committee and an African Standby Force (ASF) in order to enable the PSC to fulfil its objective of promoting peace, security and stability in Africa. The conceptual ASF will consist of five sub-regionally based brigades of about 3,000 troops and a sixth brigade based at the AU’s headquarters in Addis Ababa providing the AU with a combined standby capacity of about 15,000 troops trained in peace operations ranging from low intensity observer missions to full-blowned military interventions. The equal distribution of labour among the nations of Africa inherent in the framework of regional standby brigades also means that the aforementioned risk of regional hegemonies developing will be further reduced.

As currently foreseen, the ASF will be operationalised in two incremental phases, the first to be completed by mid-2006 (originally, June 2005), the second by 2010. So far, the progress has been encouraging. For example, AU officials have recently announced that the East African Standby Brigade (EASBRIG) will be operational by the end of 2005. The AU will also host several joint exercises with the EU, the US and Canada in the fifth cycle of RECAMP exercises in order to strengthen the coordination and interoperability of the ASF. Besides its obvious benefit of strengthening African capacity for regional peace operations in the long-run, the ASF also epitomises a much needed common objective which may finally channel the multiplicity of resources, initiatives and ambitions devoted to African capacity-building into one direction, or as Cedric de Coning put it:
The development of an African standby system is a significant achievement because it provides Africa with a common policy framework for [...] capacity building. This means that the various [...] capacity building initiatives underway, and any new programmes, can be directed to support this common objective, regardless of whether such initiatives are taking place at the regional, sub-regional or national level.  

Third, there is ample evidence that the aforementioned initiatives, whether African or international, are beginning to bear fruit. The recent African interventions in Burundi (2003), Liberia (2003) and Darfur (2004) testify to the dedicated efforts to develop a continental capacity for peace operations. While the international community, distracted by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, watched 14 years of unrest in Liberia culminate in all-out war, a not-to-be-missed window of opportunity opened in the peace process in war-torn Burundi and the “worst humanitarian and human rights catastrophe in the world” took the lives of more than 100,000 in Darfur, the willingness of African states to step up to these challenges has been exemplary. In all three cases, African organisations intervened and helped to create the conditions for a subsequent engagement of the wider international community. In Liberia, ECOWAS stepped in by sending troops well before the UN was prepared to deploy and, with some US assistance, proved itself capable of executing complex peace enforcement operations in the face of serious opposition. In Burundi, the African Union Mission (AMIB) stabilised the fragile situation and prepared the ground for a later UN peacekeeping operation. In Darfur, the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) has, despite severe financial and logistical difficulties, done remarkably well in alleviating widespread suffering and containing a conflict in which no one else was prepared to intervene.

The scheme underlying these interventions also demonstrates that the fourth and fifth objections raised against the regionalisation of peace operations miss their mark. Far from marginalising the United Nations or infringing upon the global organisation’s ultimate decision-making authority or legitimacy, these interventions have instead shown how important and mutually beneficial a division of labour based on core competencies can be for Africa, its regional and sub-regional organisations as well as the United Nations. It is important because only such a division of labour seems to allow the international community to address all conflicts in Africa in a serious manner and it is mutually beneficial because such a division of labour appears to play into the strengths and compensate for the weaknesses of both types of organisations. While the regional organisations are able to deploy faster than the United Nations, mainly because of lower minimum standards in medical evacuation and operational readiness, and are able to adopt a more robust approach to peace enforcement, only the UN has the capability to pull together the various components needed to form a complex integrated peace building response that can address the long-term post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction needs of the conflict zones. Moreover, only the UN has the resources to sustain peace operations over longer periods of time. Consequently, a hybrid model in which the UN takes over a mission with its comprehensive approach once the situation has been stabilised by an African organisation, be it ECOWAS, SADC or the African Union, seems desirable for a number of reasons.

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First, given that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has repeatedly warned that the number and scope of UN peace operations are approaching their highest levels ever - improving prospects of conflict resolution to be sure, but stretching the capacities of the system - any burden sharing under the authority of the UN Security Council makes undeniable sense. This is the case whether the burden-sharing takes the form of re-hatting regional forces after an initial phase or utilising regional troops to provide the security component alongside UN operations.\(^{56}\) The aforementioned interventions in Africa bear witness to the applicability of the re-hatting concept, that is, the transformation of regional forces into a UN mission once order is restored. The NATO KFOR mission which operated alongside the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and the International Stability Assistance Force (ISAF) which operated alongside the UN Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) are successful examples of the latter hybrid operation model in which the efforts are simultaneous rather than successive. Operational and financial realities seem to suggest that African organisations, at least for the foreseeable future, will continue to opt for the re-hatting model.\(^{57}\)

Second, concerned about the continuing willingness of the international community to come to their aid, African states have a legitimate interest in being able to deal decisively and effectively with conflicts on their own continent without denying the international community the possibility of constructive participation.

Third, the division of labour between the UN and the regional organisations, the inherent regionalisation of peace operations responsibility and the concomitant process of African integration may have a very real and valuable emancipative impact on African politics. A unifying common defence and security policy agenda, increased political institution-building and the establishment of an administrative base for cooperative ventures in other fields such as economics are only a few of the positive spill-over effects of further regionalising peace operations in Africa. In this respect, the increasing frequency of African-led peace operations may well prove to be the onset of a real African renaissance.

Given these advantages and the fact that half of its 16 current peacekeeping operations are taking place in African theatres, it is hardly surprising that the UN itself wants to strengthen African regionalism and its ability to deal with the continent’s many perils.\(^{58}\) Contrary to the beliefs of regionalists, then, the UN does not see regional organisations such as the African Union as threatening competitors in a zero-sum game, but as valuable partners in a worthwhile enterprise for which the UN alone has neither the necessary capacity nor can it foster the political will. As the mandates of UN peace operations continue to increase in complexity, becoming more comprehensive, including holding elections, protecting civilians and building government institutions, there is a notable gap between the demand for UN services and the current possible supply.\(^{59}\) It is this fact which makes regional organisations and their potential to provide an initial muscle to peace operations so essential to the future of the UN and has led Secretary-General Kofi Annan to rally behind them.

Within the context of the United Nations primary responsibility for matters of international peace and security, providing support for regional and sub-regional initiatives in Africa is both necessary and desirable. Such support is necessary, because the United Nations lacks the capacity, resources and expertise to address all problems that may arise in Africa. It is desirable because wherever possible the


\(^{57}\) De Coning, Cedric, 2005: 20-1

\(^{58}\) The eight UN missions in Africa are UNMIS (Sudan), ONUB (Burundi), UNOCI (Côte d’Ivoire), UNML (Liberia), MONUC (Democratic Republic of the Congo), UNMEE (Ethiopia and Eritrea), UNAMSIL (Sierra Leone) and MINURSO (Western Sahara).


61 African Union, PSC Protocol, Article 16 (1)


63 AU, Policy Framework for the Establishment of the ASF and Military Staff Committee, pg. 9.

64 Egeland, Jan, UN Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Spoken Remarks to the UN Security Council, 19 December 2005.

65 While cases of ill-discipline among African contingents serving in UN missions have been relatively rare and, on average, less disturbing than those committed by other contingents over the past years (Ukrainians established prostitution rings while serving in peace operations in the former Yugoslavia, Canadians tortured and killed a prisoner while serving in Somalia), the recent cases of African UN soldiers raping the very women they were sent to protect have shown that military unprofessionalism remains a problem which needs to be addressed. Berman, E. and Sams, K., 2000: 256.
African contingents may not always been avoidable. Similarly, the presence of at least six African organisations with serious peace operation ambitions, that is, the AU, ECOWAS, SADC, the East African Cooperation (EAC), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) may create tensions between these various organisations and their respective, often overlapping, memberships. These tensions are potentially further aggravated by donor-driven peace and security capacity-building initiatives, which are not always well coordinated and tend to favour some regions and member states over others. This, in addition to the uneven political and economic development of member states, differing political and security agendas and visions as well as competition between states could contribute to the asymmetrical development of regional organisations and undermine the rationalisation and integration efforts of the AU as well as the consensus required to pursue a collective security mandate and execute effective responses to conflict through African initiatives. Consequently, one of the priorities for African regionalism must be to create a synergy between the existing institutions, enabling them to complement and support one another.

Lastly, while the interventions in Burundi, Liberia and Darfur have shown that a division of labour between the United Nations and African organisations can work, many related issues still require clarification. For example, a doctrine of co-existence and cooperation needs to formalise the legal, operational and financial details of regionalising peace operation responsibility in Africa while also ensuring that the additional burdens for African states are kept as light as possible. Otherwise, large UN troop contributing countries such as Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana and Zambia may find it difficult to maintain their current deployment levels in UN peace operations and to participate meaningfully in sub-regional standby brigade initiatives.

Conclusion

Security is an essential foundation for Africa’s development. However, the challenges to African peace and security defy easy solutions. Many conflicts are multifaceted and deeply entrenched and most current conflicts in Africa, such as those in the Mano River Union conflict system (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote d’Ivoire) and the Great Lakes conflict system (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda) are therefore likely to continue to be on the international agenda over the next decade or more. Coupled with the increasing unwillingness of large parts of the international community to respond meaningfully to these crises, this fact highlights the need for alternative approaches to conflict management in Africa. Although the last section has shown that numerous problems persist for regional and sub-regional organisations to serve as the spearhead for such approaches, the last decade has seen several important developments in the regionalisation of peace operations in Africa. The parameters have clearly shifted in the direction of greater visibility and a heightened political will to act and the various organisations have slowly forged ahead with the process of establishing a viable regional peace support capability. Administrative, financial, institutional and operational structures have been established to serve as benchmarks and guidelines for

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66 For example, the deep divisions between Francophone and Anglophone blocs in West Africa and the competition between Zimbabwe and South Africa in southern Africa have undermined common agenda setting and development of collective responses to conflict. Also see Clayton, Tony, 2001: 59.
67 For example, broad differences in the peace and security mandates of regional organisations such as ECOWAS’ tradition of intervention versus the strong non-intervention norms in East Africa can complicate a coherent pan-African approach to conflict. See Franke, Benedikt (2006), Africa’s Competing Regionalisms and their Impact on the Continent’s Emerging Security Architecture, forthcoming.
68 Powell, Kristiana, 2005: 21
70 De Coning, Cedric, 2004: 2
future missions and several international initiatives have begun to remedy the significant military deficiencies of African countries and their organisations. Moreover, the regional and sub-regional organisations are seen as increasingly able to express the political will of their members and as a source of political legitimacy and moral influence. Given appropriate resources, they could certainly help to ease the United Nations’ heavy burden without infringing upon the latter’s unquestionable authority and increase the number of conflicts seriously dealt with. The regionalisation of peace operations and security responsibility surely is no panacea to Africa’s manifold perils, but the author passionately believes, and hopes to have shown, that in light of the decreasing willingness of the wider international community to intervene militarily and the increasing ability of the Africans themselves to do so, the idea is not without its merits.

71 FfP Report „African Perspectives on Military Intervention“, 2001: 1