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# AU and UN Cooperation in Peace Operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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## Introduction:

Over the last two decades, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has witnessed an extraordinary number of attempts by regional and international actors to resolve the largest conflict that Africa has seen since independence. The conflict, however, persists, at an enormous cost. The most that these attempts have achieved are several partially respected ceasefire agreements and a few incomplete efforts at reforming Congolese institutions. They have failed to end the violence now focused on eastern DRC or to reestablish central government authority throughout the country.

This brief provides an overview of the UN-AU relationship, focusing on each organization's comparative advantages and highlighting areas for improvement. It further summarizes key lessons learned from AU-UN cooperation and regional interventions in the DRC over the past several years.

## UN-AU Cooperation

UN-AU cooperation has come a long way since the first international missions were deployed to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Both organizations have grown stronger, with the ability to respond to similar crises, and both have developed different institutional strengths and weaknesses. Their respective comparative advantages are the basis for a stronger partnership. However, there is a need to improve institutional engagement in some areas, and learn from some key differences in how the AU and UN operate, deploy, and support peace missions.

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At the highest levels, the evidence consistently points to the need for strengthened partnerships between the AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the United Nations Security Council (SC). Although there have been some attempts to improve coordination, including annual consultations, there is a sense that SC members remain reluctant to give up powers. This lingering mistrust is extremely unproductive.

For example, the PSC has shown greater readiness take risks in terms of deploying missions when the SC could not arrive at a consensus on what to do, or when action was blocked by a member of the P-5. The AU is generally more flexible in deployment and its operations allow for greater risk—its troop contributors are ready to withstand greater casualties. It also has the ability to deploy more quickly, often to environments where it is harder to maintain peace, and with stronger rules of engagement. It can sometimes provide a more localized and perhaps more comprehensive understanding of the conflict environment. It also has shown to be much more flexible than the UN in its management of peace missions. In some cases this allows for faster responses by its troop contingents.

While the UN may require more time to deploy, it is supported by a much longer history of peacekeeping experience, and a practiced approach to ensure its blue helmets are adequately supported by sufficient resources and training. This creates high expectations on the side of Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs), but also enables a more structured deployment. UN contingents are usually stronger in terms of numbers and capabilities, and also bring the added value of significantly stronger civilian components. This multidimensional approach can provide strong political direction and a more integrated response to complex conflict situations. Well-developed human rights units, civil affairs teams, gender advisers, and political affairs departments are all key parts of this type of operation.

Both the AU and UN face challenges in their engagement with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and both need to further develop their relationship with these bodies to better navigate peace

operations. While the UN has chapter VIII of the UN Charter, which applies to the RECs as well as to the AU, the AU does not have an established mechanism for engaging with the RECs. To date, their engagement has mostly been on an ad-hoc basis, and often marked by competition.

It is imperative to get the politics right in peace interventions. The most important question, therefore, is not necessarily who defines the nature of the conflict, but rather whether shared analysis can be the basis for AU-UN cooperation. However, perfectly synchronizing the two Councils is not realistic, nor should it be the objective. Rather, the goal should be to make the partnership more productive, and for both to benefit from their differences and comparative advantages.

**Lessons from DRC on AU-UN cooperation**

The history of nearly sixty years of UN engagement in the Congo is long and the legacy of intervention mixed. There are also many lessons. Here are a few as they pertain to the relationship between the UN and regional organizations in Africa.

***Comparative advantages of the RECs, AU, and UN Peacekeeping***

One lesson from these wars and attempts to end them is that when an entire region is deeply divided by war, it cannot effectively enforce the peace, even if it has been successful in reaching a negotiated settlement. In other words, enemies cannot enforce the peace against themselves. They can participate in peacemaking, and ultimately must do so, but if there is to be peace enforcement, others will have to do it. Moreover, in an inter-state war of the magnitude and complexity of the Congo wars, building the peacekeeping capacity of regional organizations alone is unlikely to lead to successful peace enforcement. The AU Liaison Office in Kinshasa, for example, remains an underutilized tool between MONUSCO and the AU, to encourage information sharing, strategy development, and to test

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each other's analysis of the current context. So while the closeness of regional and sub-regional groupings to local conflict areas gives them the vested interests to seek stability in their region, this close proximity is a double-edged sword. If DRC today is any example, regional leaders will back opposing interests in the war. Thus, we must not automatically assume that “backyard operations” will lead to peace; in the case of the Congo, they have prolonged and exacerbated the war. The case of Zimbabwe invoking SADC principles to intervene militarily on behalf of Laurent Kabila during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congo War is a particular example.

### *On the Use of Force*

The same dynamics that have challenged peace enforcement by the region are the same dynamics that weakened the FIB—regional cleavages and competition. Force can thus be but one instrument of a broader political strategy. Although the initial deployment of the Force Intervention Brigade was applauded by some as a useful instrument, its utility has been limited. The composition of its force from SADC countries with regional rivalries has resulted in a reluctance to act during certain operations, and it rarely provided the leverage required to encourage the implementation of political commitments by the key protagonists. The AU Regional Task Force (RTF) targeting the LRA has been limited in its effectiveness partly due to politics and partly due to lack of coordination between its core contingents. Its institutional headquarters and Joint Coordinating Mechanism have yet to enforce any common doctrine for its operations (due to differences in capacity, resources and language), or overcome the political barriers that have prevented their pursuit of Kony's remaining forces across sovereign borders. Thus, a second lesson we can draw for both the UN and the AU is that even the most robust peacekeeping operations are essentially political missions.

### *On Mediation and Political Processes*

A third lesson one can draw from the Congo wars about regional solutions is that despite deep regional divisions, regional actors can (and did) initiate and successfully negotiate agreements to end conflicts in which large and

important portions of that region are themselves participants in the conflict. However, the lessons from the Congo also suggest that the more regionally-based the conflict is in terms of state actors involved in it, the more difficult the task of mediation becomes without external partners—partly due to capacity constraints but mostly to the need for external guarantors and credible, punitive threats for non-cooperation. In each case in the DRC, the winning formula for brokering agreements was stepped-up regional engagement, often led by South Africa, backstopped by high-level UN support (either in the form of peacekeeping or special envoys, eventually both), and sharply increased U.S. diplomatic pressure on Rwanda, Uganda, and the DRC.

The AU Panel of the Wise (or one of its representatives) has regularly been deployed to the DRC in advance of elections, or during tense moments of political contestation (May 2010, November 2011, January 2015, January 2016), but has rarely achieved a formal compromise between opposition forces. AU and REC election observation missions have played an important role in re-affirming the outcome of national elections in the DRC. However, these missions also possess the power to further destabilize the aftermath of the vote when there is a contested outcome and they are seen as driven by powerful neighbors. In DRC, the problem has not been negotiating agreements but in ensuring their implementation once they have been signed.

### *On Consent – it still matters*

Moreover, and herein lies a fourth lesson—the DRC experience and frustration with international (in-)action to end the violence reminds us that consent still matters, which makes the implementation of political mandates all that more difficult. Closer UN-regional cooperation here is critical. But in the DRC, neither the UN nor the AU has had an effective political strategy towards DRC, while powerful states in the region have, and have often worked behind-the-scenes to undermine multilateral efforts, to ensure they are the ones to determine the direction of international policy. This is despite the best efforts of Joint Special Representatives, AU and UN envoys working in tandem, and the E-Team of Envoys

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(where the UN SRSG, SESG, AU SR, U.S. SE and EU SC coordinated their engagements).

### *On the need to integrate the technical and political*

Although the most recent Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework (PSCF) was set up to reverse past precedent and initiate a comprehensive political process and hold stakeholders accountable, it too has been undone by purposeful delays on the national level, the absence of real political will amongst its regional signatories, and an international effort that has taken an overly technical approach to the PSCF's key commitments. To its credit, the National Oversight Mechanism did produce a thorough and credible benchmarking process. Over five months, the body, with the help of the UNCT, reached all eleven provinces, engaged with civil society actors and local leaders, and created a matrix designed to track political will at every level of government engagement. It also targeted the intelligence agencies and designated an entire chapter on how to make the security service more accountable through annual reports and oversight. The document in total lists 56 benchmarks and 347 indicators, and despite its immense scope, could be a useful tool and point of reference for those trying to drive the reform agenda. But a matrix does not a political process make, and thus a fifth lesson is that when the UN and the region cooperate, one needs to integrate the technical with the political. Once the M23 crisis was over, and without sufficient international and regional pressure, Kinshasa quickly lost interest in the PSCF.

### *On the changing nature of conflict*

Finally, if we can draw one overarching lesson from the UN and the region's engagement in the Congo over the last two decades, it is the growing disconnect between the international conflict response toolkit and the complexity of violence on the ground—a disconnect that is not limited to the Great Lakes as trends in the changing nature of organized violence globally attests. There is an overwhelming yet under-addressed need to manage conflict complexity, including trans-national dynamics and the proliferation of non-state actors in conflict. Many contemporary conflicts defy traditional

distinctions between 'intrastate' and 'interstate' armed conflicts. While the battlefield may be local, violence transcends territorial boundaries. These conflicts are at the same time inter-personal, local, national, regional, and international in nature, and link both state and non-state actors, sometimes with a global reach.<sup>i</sup> There is rarely a neat dividing line between the external and internal dimensions of contemporary threats yet our responses remain state-centric and flat-footed. There is a growing need to develop instruments like the UN Group of Experts on the DRC that are more nimble and flexible than peace operations. The AU would do well to think about its capacity strengthening objectives in these terms. Armed groups, financial flows, criminal syndicates, and ideas all cross borders, our responses to threats must be able to follow.

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<sup>i</sup> Tatiana Carayannis, "Complex Wars of the Congo," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 2005; see also Stathis Kalyvas (2006)

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