

Global and Regional Peacekeepers: Trends, Opportunities, Risks and a Way Ahead

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Abstract

Never before has it been so important for policymakers to balance regional and global forms of peacekeeping. Although the United Nations Security Council retains primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security and is the single largest source of peacekeepers, some regional organizations, particularly in Africa and Europe, are playing increasingly important roles. This article analyzes the relationship between UN peace operations and those conducted by regional organizations. After summarizing recent trends in regional-global collaboration it analyzes the opportunities and risks of increasing the regionalization of peace operations. Current policy challenges are daunting, not least because better-resourced missions alone will not bring peace to contemporary warzones. Rather, policymakers should clarify the nature and limits of UN peace operations; ensure partnerships between the UN and regional organizations can deliver effective peace operations in the field; and embed peace operations within a viable conflict resolution strategy to end the war or crisis in question.

Recent high-level reviews have analyzed the state of United Nations (UN) peace operations, the roles of new technologies in peacekeeping, the global peacebuilding architecture, and the poor state of implementing the women, peace, and security agenda (UN 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). Debates about how best to implement their recommendations continue. The global-regional axis is an important dimension of those debates, especially in Africa, where most UN peacekeepers and regional operations have been deployed.

The UN Security Council remains the most authoritative institution on issues of international peace and security across the globe, including peace operations. The UN has conducted more peacekeeping operations than any other party – 72 between 1948 and 2016 – and has deployed, by far, the largest number of peacekeepers. This reflects the relatively high levels of legitimacy the UN can generate for its missions and the fact that it is one of the few international organizations that can financially sustain its operations in the field.

But the UN has never had a monopoly on peacekeeping. Between 1946 and 2016, thirteen regional organizations conducted 65 peace operations (see Appendix S1). The rise in regional operations reflected a broader trend of regional organizations assuming greater roles in responding to peace and security challenges (Crocker et al., 2011). Sometimes these organizations challenged UN primacy but, especially since the end of the Cold War, they more frequently partnered with the UN to maintain international peace and security (Gelot, 2012). This article provides an overview of recent trends in regional-global collaboration with regard to peace operations and analyzes the opportunities and risks of increasing regionalization.

The new regional landscape: seven recent trends

Regionalization in peace operations is commonly understood in both empirical and explicitly normative terms. Empirically, it denotes the increasing participation of regional organizations in peace operations. In normative terms, it refers to the idea that each region of the world 'should be responsible for its own peacemaking and peacekeeping, with some financial and technical support from the West but few, if any, military or police contingents from outside the region' (Goulding, 2002, p. 217).

As a shorthand descriptor for what is happening across the contemporary peacekeeping landscape, 'regionalization' is misleading in several respects. First, regional organizations are not the only important actors in peace operations; the UN, coalitions, and individual states play significant roles as well. Moreover, when regional organizations deploy peace operations, such forces are usually limited to a coalition of willing members within the organization. Second, regionalization is occurring unevenly across regions. While some regions are willing and able to conduct peace operations, others have the will but lack the relevant capabilities; some dislike the idea of conducting military operations but are keen to undertake political and observer missions; still other regional organizations have no desire to perform collective peace operations of any sort; and some parts of the world have no significant regional arrangements at all. Third, not all regional arrangements confine their activities to their own region; for example, some Western regional organizations, such as the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), operate well beyond their own neighborhoods. These are the exceptions rather than the rule in the domain of regional peace operations.

To describe today's peacekeeping landscape as simply increasing regionalization is therefore inaccurate. Rather, seven interrelated trends can be identified that amount to a more complex reality.

The United Nations remains the single most important peacekeeper

Since 1946, there have been 72 UN-led peace operations authorizing the deployment of over 415,000 uniformed personnel. Overall, the UN has a good record of fulfilling its core peacekeeping tasks and has a financial system that can sustain its operations (Doyle and Sambanis, 2006; Fortna, 2008; Koops et al., 2015). The UN currently fields 16 peacekeeping operations, as well as another two dozen or so special political missions that involve over 100,000 uniformed personnel, including troops, police, and military experts, and approximately 20,000 civilian staff. In Asia and the Middle East, the UN has conducted more peace operations than regional organizations; in other regions of the world, it is matched by regional organizations (see Table 1). Since the end of the Cold War, approximately 80 per cent of UN peacekeepers were deployed in Africa (see Figure 1).

More peace operations are being conducted by regional organizations, especially the African Union and European Union

This trend has become particularly pronounced since the end of the Cold War (see Figure 2). Of the 65 regional peace

operations conducted since 1946, 48 – roughly 74 per cent – took place after 1989. It is also notable that most of these post-Cold War missions were larger than their Cold War counterparts. Since the late 1990s, there have often been more than ten regional peace operations in any calendar year. During the 21st century, the African Union (AU) and EU have conducted far more peace operations than any other regional organization. Notably, the EU's peace operations deploy out of area, which is rare for regional organizations, most of which focus their activities in their own neighborhoods.

There is significant variation in how regional arrangements approach peace operations

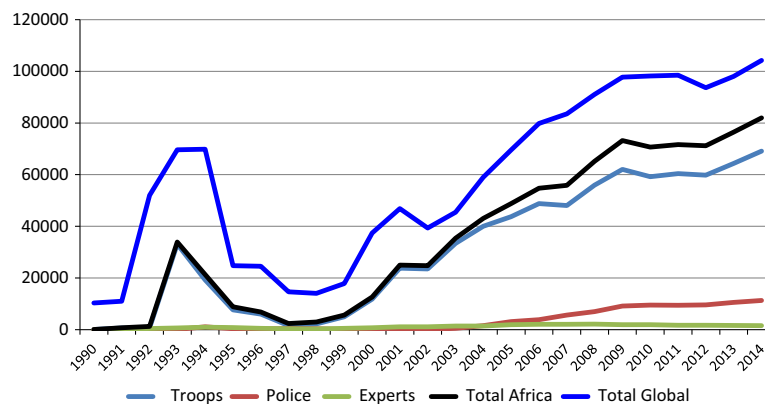
The 65 operations listed in the Appendix S1 were carried out by 13 different regional organizations. Scholarly literature has offered four sets of explanations for this regional variation but has not come to a consensus on the relationship among them (Williams and Haacke, 2011). The first set of explanations focuses on the exercise of political power, especially the roles played by internal and external hegemons. The second cluster emphasizes domestic factors, particularly the ways in which the political character of regimes can affect regional choices and domestic coalitions can shape regional preferences. A third set of explanations points to ideational factors, particularly the ways in which regional approaches to conflict management are shaped by shared security cultures that predispose their members to certain actions and policies. The fourth set revolves around

Table 1. Number of regional and UN peace operations by region, 1946–2016

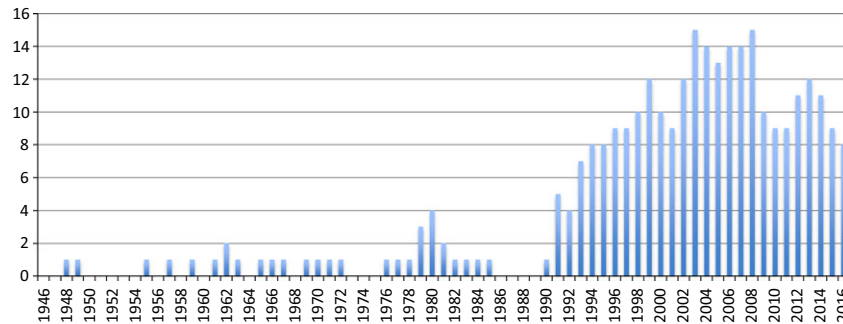
	Africa	Americas	Asia	Caucasus	Europe	Middle East (Including Egypt)	Pacific
Regional missions	39	9	2	2	8	4	1
UN missions	33	7	10	1	10	11	0

Source: Compiled by author.

Figure 1. UN Uniformed Peacekeepers Worldwide and in Africa.



Source: Compiled by author from data in the IPI Peacekeeping Database, at <http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/contributions/>

Figure 2. Number of regional peace operations since 1946.

Source: Compiled by author (see Appendix S1).

collective capacity issues, since regional organizations can conduct conflict management initiatives only if they have relevant resources and capabilities. Hence, organizations populated by richer states with more developed power projection capabilities are more likely to be proactive in managing conflicts than poorer, less well-equipped states. For a regional organization to conduct peace operations, it needs to conceive of such activities as legitimate, persuade some of its members to participate in particular crises, and develop the appropriate material capabilities.

The UN Security Council has used its authority more frequently to support regional peace operations

Starting in 1995 the UN Security Council has authorized just over 40 per cent of regional peace operations. This suggests that in the post-Cold War era, regional organizations undertaking peace operations increasingly value the additional legitimacy – and sometimes legality – that comes with receiving authorization from the UN Security Council. Moreover, this means most of the regional peace operations conducted since the end of the Cold War have conformed to the rules of the UN system rather than tried to break or bypass them.

Debate over the principal purposes of peace operations continues, and some regional voices are crucial in this debate

The multifaceted mandates assigned to many contemporary peace operations have blurred the lines between peacekeeping, war fighting, stabilization, counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, atrocity prevention, state-building, and regime-consolidation tasks – particularly in the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mali, and Somalia, where the UN and AU have explicitly designated enemy groups. Most of these tasks stretch the principles and guidelines on which UN peacekeeping is currently based (UN, 2008). This has led some regional organizations to develop different approaches to peace operations. Arguably, the most important attempt to do so is the

AU's efforts to define its 'peace support operations' (de Coning et al., 2016). This includes adopting a more assertive position on the use of military force, including a willingness to designate particular groups as enemies of its missions.

Africa remains the region with the most intense global-regional collaboration on peace operations

Since the end of the Cold War, nearly 73 per cent – 35 out of 48 – of all regional peace operations were deployed to Africa. Indeed, the last 15 peace operations conducted by regional organizations, dating back to 2004, have all taken place in Africa. Africa has also been, by far, the site of most UN peacekeepers deployed after the Cold War (Williams, 2016b). Several patterns have emerged on the continent: the number of peacekeepers, missions, and budgets has risen consistently; partnership peacekeeping has become the norm; and African states and the AU play increasingly important roles in various peace operations, both those conducted by the UN and regional organizations (Williams, 2015).

The UN–AU collaboration on peace and security is based on mutual recognition of several important facts. First, in the 21st century, the majority of the UN Security Council's agenda has been occupied by peace and security challenges in Africa. Second, both institutions recognize that the UN Security Council has the primary – but not exclusive – responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, including in Africa. Third, both institutions acknowledge that, alone, neither can cope with the multitude of peace and security challenges on the continent. Both institutions now also recognize that while the AU is an important source of political authority for conflict management in Africa, it lacks the necessary material and financial capabilities to take decisive action alone to resolve these problems, as was highlighted by the ongoing crisis in Mali (AU, 2013, para. 53). Based on these shared insights, AU–UN collaboration on peace operations evolved as part of the broader effort to create the new African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) (Williams and Dersso, 2015).

In Africa, partnership peacekeeping, including partnerships between global and regional peacekeepers, has become the norm

Partnership peacekeeping involves collaboration among various multilateral and bilateral actors and institutions to deploy one or more peace operations in the same theater (UN, 2015d). The most important and sustained partnership has been that between the AU and UN. However, the EU and several states, notably France and the United States, have partnered to support AU and UN peace operations in Africa (Williams, 2016a).

The African context of partnership peacekeeping is further complicated by the peacekeeping activities of regional economic communities (RECs).¹ Their centrality to the APSA has, at times, complicated the UN's tasks in peace operations where the AU and relevant RECs did not always share the same policies. Officially, the relationship between the AU and RECs is supposed to be guided by the principles of subsidiarity, complementarity, and comparative advantage, but those terms have been defined ambiguously, generating practical problems in responses to crises in Africa (Ndiaye, 2016).

In sum, the UN remains the largest provider of peace operations and peacekeepers, but regional organizations have become important actors since the end of the Cold War. Regional organizations exhibit considerable diversity in their involvement in peace operations. The AU and EU are most active, but some organizations play no role in this sector. Consequently, the UN has developed innovative mechanisms to support regional peace operations. In the past decade, most peace operations and UN support have centered on Africa, where partnership peacekeeping has become the norm.

Opportunities and risks of regionalizing peace operations

Two characteristics of the UN system have encouraged regional organizations to undertake peace operations. First, Chapter VIII of the UN Charter encourages 'regional arrangements' to peacefully resolve conflicts that occur within their neighborhoods, but it forbids them from taking enforcement measures without authorization from the UN Security Council. Second, the UN's lack of standing armed forces has meant that it often needs to delegate other actors to undertake peace operations on its behalf, especially those involving large-scale enforcement activities. The growing number of regional organizations conducting peace operations has thus provided the UN with an expanded set of options. But beyond these charter provisions, it is not clear what practical support the UN should provide regional peace operations, and how. The UN Security Council's inconsistent engagement with regional operations, especially in Africa, has also confused the issue (Boulden, 2013).

As a result, the UN has collaborated with regional organizations in an ad hoc manner. The three most common forms of collaboration are:

1. Parallel operations, involving simultaneous collaboration by a UN and regional peace operation in the same theater.
2. Sequential operations, wherein UN and regional peace operations deploy in sequence, usually in a regional-to-UN transition.
3. Support packages, wherein the UN supports a regional peace operation, usually with technical, logistical and financial assistance.

Overall, these models of partnership have worked reasonably well inasmuch as they facilitated flexible and pragmatic responses to various crisis zones. Nevertheless, they have also revealed weaknesses and limitations.

Potential advantages of regional peacekeepers

In 1992, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1992, para. 63) argued that regional organizations 'can render great service if their activities are undertaken in a manner consistent with the purposes and principles of the charter'. In some conflicts, regional organizations can provide enhanced legitimacy and sensitivity borne of a greater working knowledge of the relevant circumstances. Moreover, their geographical proximity should allow them to deploy and supply peacekeepers relatively quickly. This was the case in several West African missions during the 1990s and in Mali and CAR in the 2010s where African states from the subregion assumed the role of first responders before UN missions took over.

Regional organizations can also bring additional resources to peace operations beyond those available from the UN. In some cases, regional peace operations may be the only realistic option in conflicts where the UN declined to deploy peacekeepers. In this sense, regional arrangements can help fill some of the gaps in international conflict management left by the UN Security Council's selective approach. For example, African organizations have responded with peace operations in the absence of UN action: Burundi, Congo-Brazzaville, and Liberia in the 1990s and Burundi, Guinea-Bissau, and Somalia in the 2000s. Regional organizations can also bring additional capabilities. The EU, for instance, has provided approximately €2 billion to African peace operations since 2004 through its African Peace Facility. Similarly, NATO has sometimes been crucial in conducting airstrikes (e.g. in Bosnia) and providing strategic lift capabilities to deploy African peacekeepers in a variety of theaters, including Darfur and Somalia.

In some instances, parties to a conflict may prefer the involvement of regional actors rather than the UN or other external bodies, hence the frequent calls for Arab, African, or Asian solutions to regional problems. This argument about regional legitimacy 'relies on the notion that the people and governments in a region have a natural affinity with those in that geographic area and an inherent suspicion of what they perceive as outside intervention' (Diehl, 2007, p. 541). This has certainly been the case in a variety of conflicts, such as those in Darfur, where for four years Sudan would only permit African, and not UN, peacekeepers, and

in the Caucasus, where Russia was ready to utilize CIS peace operations but was skeptical of UN missions.

Another argument suggests that the region's proximity to the crisis in question means that its members have to live with the consequences of unresolved conflicts. Therefore, regional arrangements may be more likely to sustain long-term peacekeeping operations. The experiences of the EU and NATO in Bosnia and the AU's experiences in Somalia, for example, support this argument.

Potential disadvantages of regional peacekeepers

Regional organizations suffer from many of the same constraints and problems faced by UN peace operations as well as other distinct disadvantages. Geographic proximity to a conflict does not automatically generate a regional consensus on how to respond. As Diehl (2007, pp. 540–541) has pointed out, although 'one might expect regional organizations to have an advantage over the United Nations because their membership is more homogenous', in fact, the 'most common threats to regional peace – internal threats – are exactly those least likely to generate consensus'. Immediate neighbors often have different views on how a local conflict should be resolved, which often has repercussions for the deployment of any peace operation. This might encourage a tendency for forum shopping, where great powers or powerful local actors seek more pliable peacekeepers. Russia's preference to support CIS rather than UN peacekeepers in the Caucasus or Sudan's demand, reiterated in Security Council resolution 1769, that any peacekeeping force in Darfur must retain its 'predominantly African character', are examples.

A related point is that regional organizations can be particularly susceptible to the pull of partisan interests, especially those associated with a regional hegemon such as Nigeria in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) or Russia in the CIS. Because of the inability of regional organizations to act against their most powerful members, regional peace operations 'are unlikely to be authorized in conflicts that directly involve the global powers or regional powers' (Diehl, 2007, p. 543). Instead, local hegemons have often used regional arrangements to legitimize their activities in conflicts that are relevant to them rather than those going on inside their borders. This kind of manipulation was clearly evident in the Nigerian-led ECOWAS operations in Liberia (1990) and Sierra Leone (1997), the Russian-led CIS operations in Georgia (1994), and the Australian-led Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) operation in the Solomon Islands (2003).

Compared to the United Nations, regional organizations lack experience in conducting peace operations. Even the AU and EU, the busiest regional organizations, have undertaken only a small fraction of the operations conducted by the UN. In some cases, the regional organizations in question, such as NATO and the PIF, have also lacked provisions in their charters authorizing peace operations.

Regional organizations, with the possible exceptions of NATO and EU, operate with relatively small bureaucracies and budgets and lack the administrative, logistical, and

command structures necessary to manage large-scale military operations. The problem is, as Diehl (2007, p. 546) noted, that 'merely having the authority to carry out a conflict management activity is not enough if the organization lacks the requisite resources [financial, political, and military] to take effective action'. A poorly equipped and funded peace operation can generate its own problems. Indeed, a serious deficiency of mission support structures has been identified as one of the major failings of the APSA and, consequently, the AU's peace operations (Lotze, 2016). The United Nations' assessed contributions for peacekeeping are a sustainable form of financial support for peace operations, far better than most regional alternatives. In addition, the UN has developed peacekeeping standards in training and equipment that are lacking in many regional organizations.

Another problem stems from the uneven levels and types of regionalization evident around the globe. In particular, some parts of the world, including areas of intense confrontation such as across the Middle East and Central and South Asia, have no regional organizations capable of conducting significant peace operations. Attempting to subcontract the United Nations' responsibilities to the regional level in such areas could have disastrous effects. As the former head of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations warned, regionalization can encourage an 'only in my backyard' approach that spells trouble for regions that lack the necessary capacities (Guéhenno, 2003).

Finally, although the UN Security Council faces several significant problems, no other organization can consistently generate as much international legitimacy for its missions as the UN. This is part of the reason why regional peace operations seek authorization from the Security Council (Williams, 2013). As then UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali (1999, p. 306) concluded in 1995, if regionalization threatened to weaken the internationalist basis of the UN, it should be treated as a 'dangerous' idea.

Conclusions

Never before has it been so important for policymakers to balance regional and global forms of peacekeeping. While the UN Security Council retains primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security and is the single largest source of peacekeepers, some regional organizations, particularly in Africa and Europe, are playing increasingly important roles. The current challenges are daunting. Both global and regional peacekeepers will struggle to pacify warzones where civilians are deliberately targeted, factions fight without clear political agendas, and the lines between political and criminal violence are increasingly blurred. Better-resourced peace operations would help, but more resources alone will not bring peace to these warzones.

With different international organizations likely to maintain distinct approaches to peace operations and unique comparative advantages, the policy challenge is how to ensure the resulting international division of labor can deliver effective peace operations in particular crises. Following three steps would help.

First, it would be useful to clarify the limits of UN peace operations. It will be increasingly difficult to build political consensus around and provide practical support to UN peace operations if they mean different things to different actors. The UN Security Council and the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations should, therefore, urgently clarify the limits and principal purposes of UN-led peace operations. This should include clarifying the meaning of stabilization operations in the context of UN peacekeeping and the role of UN peacekeepers in counterinsurgency campaigns or counterterrorism. Training regimes and force requirements for operations should be developed in line with these definitions.

Second, given the large number of operations in Africa, the UN Security Council and the AU need to clarify the nature of their strategic partnership now that the UN's ten year capacity-building program for the AU has finished. Specifically, it is urgent that AU peace operations have access to predictable, sustainable, and flexible funding and that the UN develops appropriate support mechanisms for them.

Finally, political leaders at the UN and within regional organizations must remember 'the primacy of politics' (UN, 2015a) and ensure that peace operations are only deployed as part of a viable conflict resolution strategy to end the war or crisis in question.

Notes

This paper is excerpted from a Council on Foreign Relations Discussion Paper series, 'Global Order and the New Regionalism', edited by Miles Kahler. A link to the full papers can be found here <http://cfr.org/RegionalChallenges>.

1. The AU has a formal relationship with six RECs through the APSA: AMU, ECOWAS, SADC, IGAD, ECCAS, and CEN-SAD. The AU also has a formal relationship with two regional mechanisms as part of the APSA effort to build the African Standby Force: the North African Regional Capability (NARC) and the Eastern Africa Standby Force (EASF).

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Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found online in the supporting information tab for this article:

Appendix S1. Regional peace operations, 1946–2016.

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