

MEETING THE DEMAND FOR AFRICAN-LED, INTERNATIONALLY SUPPORTED PEACE INTERVENTIONS

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The Priority

Since peaking in the early 1990s, instances of armed conflict have been waning across sub-Saharan Africa. In spite of this trend, there remains a persistent demand on the African continent for peacekeeping missions—led by the United Nations, African Union or sub-regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States. With 15 U.N. peacekeeping missions worldwide, 78 percent of U.N. peacekeepers are serving in the eight ongoing missions in Africa. In terms of African countries' ability to provide collective responses to regional crises, the AU's African Standby Force (ASF), which has regional brigades in each of the continent's five regions, was supposed serve this function. However, the timelines for the ASF to become fully operational have been delayed several times and not all of the regional brigades are expected to be combat ready until at least 2015. With recurring demands for peace interventions, most recently in Mali, Guinea-Bissau and the Central African Republic

(CAR), African regional and sub-regional organizations should continue to prioritize establishing a more robust crisis response capability.

Why Is It Important?

In theory, AU and sub-regional peacekeeping missions that are well planned, funded, manned and executed ostensibly limit the need for eventual U.N. or foreign power intervention. Yet, recent responses on the part of the AU and sub-regional organizations have been compromised by a lack of combat readiness, insufficient manpower and funding for the scope and scale of intervention, and limited bandwidth to address concurrent crises. Indeed, the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) is often touted as a model for African-led, internationally supported military intervention. However, the mission's relative progress came after five years of stagnation and on the heels of concentrated diplomatic pressure on the transitional government.

More recently, it took nine months after the collapse of the Malian state for the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) to get boots on the ground—a deployment that was in reality accelerated by the jihadists’ push south and the ensuing French intervention in January 2013. In addition, the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic (MISCA) has not been able to prevent Séléka forces that now purport to rule the country from continuing to commit serious human rights abuses against civilian populations as the U.N. Security Council deliberates a possible transition to a U.N. mission. In sum, even if such interventions rely on support from the U.N. or the international donor community, there is no doubt that African regional and sub-regional organizations increasingly seek to take the lead in responding to crises on the continent. Nonetheless, significant progress needs to be made in Africa to close the gap between the demand for crisis response and the actual ability for these entities to respond in an effective manner.

In this context, the AU has been deliberating the establishment of a rapid reaction force, an African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC), which will serve as an interim measure until the aforementioned ASF becomes fully operational. Originally, the concept of the ASF was to include a rapid deployment capability (RDC), which would allow for early intervention (within 14 days of an authorized mandate) to respond to “grave circumstances” such as mass atrocities and war crimes. Yet, the fact that the ASF and the RDC are well behind their readiness timelines raises the question of whether the new concept of the ACIRC will face similar operationalization delays, or could even detract focus from the development of the original ASF framework.

Aside from concepts of operation for crisis response, insufficient funding for such interventions has also been an obstacle to the deployment of AU and sub-regional peacekeeping missions. Established by the European Union in 2004, the African Peace Facility was intended to provide a reliable stream of funding to cover some of the peacekeeping deployment costs for African countries. Yet, while this arrangement should have facilitated the development of African capacity to plan and sustain peacekeeping missions, the AU and sub-regional organizations continue to struggle with funding potential interventions.

What Should Be Done in 2014

The current mechanisms for AU and sub-regional organizations to address conflicts and unconstitutional changes of government have proven ad hoc, slow-moving, and at times unreliable, as demonstrated by recent events in Mali and the CAR. Indeed, with Africa as a focus for international peacekeeping operations, the fact that the ASF and the RDC remain more concepts on paper than reliable crisis response capabilities will continue to impede African agency in providing “African solutions to African problems.” Regardless, the reality is that support from the U.N. and the international donor community will continue to be necessary to meet the demand for peace interventions in Africa. Therefore, in order to close the gap between conception and reality, the AU, sub-regional organizations and the international community should take the following steps:

- In an effort to prevent the creation of the ACIRC from usurping the momentum for the much-needed ASF framework, the AU’s Peace and Security Council and sub-regional planning elements should demand greater accountability for the combat-readiness standards of regional brigades so that the ASF can eventually constitute credible and viable crisis response force.
- It is in the interest of the international community for African countries and regional organizations to be capable of responding to regional crises. Thus, there should be greater donor coordination to address the systemic challenges that may preclude African militaries from responding more readily to crises. Areas of emphasis should include: increasing regional capacity to plan multilateral interventions; training and equipping African troops to operate (even in situations where there is no peace to keep), while mitigating civilian casualties; and continuing to provide force multipliers and combat enablers.
- The international donor community should augment previous utilization of the EU’s African Peace Facility to coordinate a reliable funding stream for U.N.-mandated African peace interventions.

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