POLICY BRIEF

THE AFRICAN UNION, THE UNITED NATIONS AND PEACEKEEPING IN AN EVOLVING INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

AMANI AFRICA

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El-Ghassim Wane

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I. INTRODUCTION

Africa's relationship with United Nations (UN) peacekeeping has come full circle—not because the continent has returned to where it started, but because, after several decades of developing its own peacekeeping ambitions and capabilities, it has once again had to reckon with the continuing centrality of the UN. This relationship went through various stages: an initial phase in which African states largely looked to the UN to assume the peacekeeping responsibility, reflecting its Charter-based mandate, operational capabilities and access to resources; a timid foray into the world of peacekeeping in the early 1990s, with the authorisation and deployment of operations of limited duration and scope; the fundamental changes that accompanied the advent of the African Union (AU) in July 2000 and the adoption of the Peace and Security Council Protocol two years later, with the full-fledged introduction of peace support operations (PSOs) into the AU toolbox; and, more recently, a sober recognition of the limits to the organization's ambitions, linked notably to logistical and financial constraints, bringing it back, in some respects, to the caution that marked the earlier period and underscoring the continuing centrality of the UN.

However, this apparent return to the UN is taking place at a moment when the future of United Nations peacekeeping itself is under intense scrutiny. The Organisation is confronting a peacekeeping environment fundamentally different from that which prevailed during the period of its greatest expansion. Large multidimensional operations have been closing or drawing down, while those that remain face complex conflicts, contested political environments and severe financial constraints. The UN's own recent review on the future of all forms of United Nations peace operations, submitted by the Secretary-General in July 2026, calls for a 'reset'[1] in the way these instruments are conceived and used. As such, the review reflects a recognition that the model itself must evolve if peace operations are to remain effective and relevant.

This convergence raises a fundamental question for Africa. If the UN remains indispensable to the continent's peace and security, what kind of UN peacekeeping does Africa need—and what kind of partnership should it have with it? The answer cannot lie in a return to the model of the past, nor in an expectation that the AU should simply shoulder responsibilities that the UN can no longer sustain. For African states, the value of the UN extends beyond its capacity to deploy uniformed personnel. In an international environment marked by the renewed prominence of force and coercion, a functioning multilateral system is particularly important for African countries. It provides a framework through which they can collectively articulate their interests and amplify their political weight, while helping mitigate existing power asymmetries.

Peacekeeping is one of the clearest practical expressions of multilateralism. But for the UN to remain relevant in Africa, its peace operations must adapt to changing political realities: mandates need to be more focused and politically grounded, missions more responsive to regional contexts, and African institutions more systematically involved in shaping their strategic direction. This calls for a

1 *United Nations Secretary-General, 'Review of All Forms of United Nations Peace Operations', 22 July 2026, A/80/798–S/2026/600, paragraph 23.*

partnership that combines the UN's global legitimacy and operational capacities with the AU's political engagement, regional knowledge and normative framework. The future of peacekeeping in Africa should therefore not be framed as a choice between UN primacy and African autonomy, but as an opportunity to build a more effective and genuinely complementary form of multilateralism.

II. THE OAU'S EARLY EXPERIENCE WITH PEACEKEEPING

The approach of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to conflict management was rooted in the peaceful settlement of disputes. Its Charter committed Member States to resolve disputes through negotiation, mediation, conciliation or arbitration and provided for a Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration, whose Protocol was adopted in July 1964. However, the Commission never became operational, reflecting both its limited reach and Member States' preference for flexible political mediation over formal or quasi-judicial procedures.

The OAU therefore relied primarily on ad hoc committees, commissions and individual statesmen to manage conflicts, predominantly interstate disputes, although it also engaged in internal conflicts. As the Organisation's supreme political organ, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government provided a forum for negotiations and private discussions among leaders, while articulating principles and norms that helped stabilise conflicts and related negotiations.

That said, the predominance of political and diplomatic methods did not imply indifference to collective military capabilities. From the OAU's inception, African leaders explored the idea of an African military instrument. At the founding conference in Addis Ababa in May 1963, President Kwame Nkrumah called for an African High Command, which, in his view, would not only have coordinated the defence of the continent against external aggression, but also served as a peace-keeping force in conflicts between African countries, policing, protecting and patrolling disputed areas along shared borders. The proposal was subsequently discussed by the OAU Defence Commission in December 1963, including its potential role in addressing specific conflicts at the time. None of these proposals secured sufficient political support.

A more modest proposal emerged at the Defence Commission's second meeting in Freetown in February 1965, which recommended an African Defence Organisation based on voluntary contributions of national units for specific operations. The idea resurfaced in response to external aggression and regional crises. In 1979, the Monrovia Summit accepted in principle the creation of an OAU Defence Force, subject to further study of its financial and legal implications. Once again, political agreement failed to translate into concrete steps.[2]

2 *For a detailed account of the OAU's early efforts in conflict management and the instruments it employed, see Organization of African Unity (OAU), Council of Ministers, 'Report of the Secretary-General on the Establishment of a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Resolution and Management', CM/1767 (LVIII), Fifty-Eighth Ordinary Session, 21–26 June 1993, paragraphs 7-123.*

Against this background, the OAU eventually ventured into peacekeeping. Its operation in Chad in the early 1980s was its first significant attempt to deploy a peacekeeping force. Short-lived and ultimately unsuccessful, it exposed the gap between political willingness and the logistical and financial capacity to sustain such an undertaking. It also marked an important moment in the OAU's relationship with the UN: having attempted to act independently, the Organisation had to seek UN resources and support to make such operations viable.[3]

III. BUILDING AN AFRICAN FRAMEWORK FOR CONFLICT-MANAGEMENT

By the late 1970s and 1980s, the limitations of the OAU's conflict-management system had become increasingly apparent. Ad hoc committees facilitated dialogue but rarely secured durable settlements, while the Organisation lacked standing preventive diplomacy capacity, institutional continuity and adequate analytical, operational and financial resources. The principle of non-interference further constrained engagement in internal conflicts. Reform proposals sought–unsuccessfully–to revive the Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration and establish stronger political and military instruments.

The end of the Cold War coincided with increasingly destructive internal conflicts, state collapse, displacement and humanitarian crises. These exposed the inadequacy of mechanisms designed largely for interstate disputes. As the liberation struggle against colonialism and racial domination approached its culmination, the OAU also faced the question of its future political and security role.

In July 1990, Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim presented a report, calling for a reassessment of Africa's collective response.[4] The Assembly adopted a Declaration reflecting this broader reconsideration. The 1991 Kampala process similarly emphasized the interdependence of security, stability, development and cooperation through the emerging Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA).[5]

At the Dakar Summit in June 1992, the Assembly agreed in principle to establish a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. Following further proposals from the Secretary-General, the Mechanism was formally adopted at the Cairo Summit in June 1993.

3 See OAU, Report on the Establishment of a Mechanism, paragraphs 110-123; 'Resolution on Chad,' AHG/Res. 102 (XVIII) Rev. 1, adopted by the Eighteenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, Nairobi, 27 June 1981; and United Nations Security Council, Resolution 504 (1982),'"Establishment of a Fund for a Peace-keeping Force of the Organization of African Unity in Chad,' S/RES/504 (1982), 30 April 1982.

4 Organization of African Unity (OAU), Council of Ministers, Report of the Secretary-General on the Fundamental Changes Taking Place in the World and Their Implications for Africa: Proposals for an African Response, Fifty-Second Ordinary Session, Addis Ababa, 3–7 July 1990, CM/1592 (LII).

5 For a detailed analysis of the genesis of the 1990 Report and Declaration, and their subsequent evolution, see Said Djinnit and El-Ghassim Wane, 'An African Agenda for Peace, Governance and Development at Thirty: A Retrospective Look at the Genesis and Significance of the OAU's July 1990 Declaration on Fundamental Changes', World Peace Foundation, Occasional Paper No. 24, July 2020.

The Cairo Declaration marked a turning point by placing conflict prevention, management and resolution within a standing institutional framework rather than relying on ad hoc initiatives. Its principal innovation was to prioritize anticipation and prevention. Where conflicts had erupted, the OAU could undertake peacemaking and peace-building, including civilian and military observation and monitoring missions of limited scope and duration. The aim was to avoid costly and complex peacekeeping operations.

Peacekeeping thus entered the OAU's institutional framework, but within carefully defined limits. Where conflicts required 'collective international intervention and policing,' the OAU would seek UN assistance, including financial, logistical and military support under the terms of the UN Charter, with African countries contributing to such undertakings and participating effectively in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. The Declaration modestly expanded African responsibility without seeking to replace the UN as the principal provider of large-scale peacekeeping.

The Mechanism's political direction rested with a Central Organ comprising members of the Assembly Bureau. The Secretary-General and General Secretariat served as its operational arm. A dedicated Peace Fund was established to finance conflict-management activities through the regular budget, voluntary African contributions and approved external contributions. However, reliance on voluntary and external funding foreshadowed the persistent gap between political ambition and available resources.

Unlike the CMCA, the Cairo Mechanism developed an operational record that combined mediation and preventive diplomacy with limited observer missions. In Rwanda, the OAU's Neutral Military Observer Group (NMOG), deployed in two successive phases to monitor the ceasefire and support the Arusha process, was absorbed into the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) in November 1993, illustrating how African engagement could pave the way for a larger UN operation. In Burundi, following President Melchior Ndadaye's assassination in October 1993, the OAU's proposed protection mission was not deployed; instead, the OAU Observer Mission in Burundi (OMIB) operated from 1994 to 1996. In the Comoros, the OAU deployed observer missions at different points between 1997 and 2002, while in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it contributed observers to support the Lusaka ceasefire agreement between 1999 and 2000. In the Ethiopia–Eritrea conflict, the OAU facilitated the 2000 Algiers Agreements and deployed the OAU Liaison Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (OLMEE), which operated alongside the much larger UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) from 2000 to 2008.

While the Mechanism strengthened the OAU's capacity for prevention, mediation and limited operations, important weaknesses remained. Its provisions for PSOs were limited, with the OAU relying on the UN for large-scale peacekeeping. The principle of non-interference continued to constrain engagement in internal conflicts, while the absence of a clear framework for responding to mass atrocities or state collapse limited the scope for stronger collective action. The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda starkly exposed these shortcomings: despite the

presence of a UN peacekeeping mission, the international response failed to stop the genocide, underscoring that reliance on the UN alone was no guarantee of effective action. These lessons informed the transition to the AU and the creation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). [6]

IV. THE CHANGING NATURE OF AFRICAN PEACE SUPPORT OPERATIONS

4.1. A New Institutional and Normative Framework

The transition from the OAU to the AU marked a fundamental shift in the political conception of African peace and security. Initiated by the 1999 Sirte Declaration, the process culminated in the adoption of the Constitutive Act in 2000 and the launch of the AU in 2002. While retaining sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference as core principles, the AU established a stronger framework for collective action. Article 4(h) recognized the Union's right to intervene in a Member State, by decision of the Assembly, in cases of grave circumstances—war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity—while Article 4(j) recognized Member States' right to request AU intervention to restore peace and security. Non-interference was thus no longer an absolute principle.

6 On the evolution from the Cairo Mechanism to the Peace and Security Council (PSC) Protocol, including the Mechanism's achievements and the challenges it encountered, see El-Ghassim Wane, 'L'Union africaine à l'épreuve des opérations de soutien à la paix : entre innovations institutionnelles et contraintes opérationnelles', dans David Morin et Lori-Anne Théroux-Bénoni (dir.), Guide du maintien de la paix 2011 : L'Afrique et les opérations de paix (Athéna Éditions, 2011).

The Constitutive Act also committed the Member States to democratic principles, human rights, rule of law and good governance, and rejected unconstitutional changes of government. The AU was therefore conceived not simply as the OAU's successor, but as an organisation with a stronger mandate to respond to crises threatening peace, security and fundamental norms.

The key step in operationalising this vision was the Protocol establishing the Peace and Security Council (PSC), adopted in July 2002 and entering into force in December 2003. The PSC became the AU's standing decision-making organ for conflict prevention, management and resolution. Together with the African Standby Force, Continental Early Warning System, Panel of the Wise and Peace Fund, and in coordination with the Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, it forms the core of APSA.

The most consequential change for the evolution of peacekeeping was the incorporation of PSOs as an instrument for deployments on a scale and with a level of responsibility that went well beyond the limited observer missions envisaged under the Cairo Mechanism. The PSC Protocol empowers the PSC to 'authorize the mounting and deployment of peace support missions' and determine their mandates and guidelines. It also provides for an African Standby Force comprising civilian, police and military capabilities to enable the PSC to deploy missions and, where authorised, intervene in grave circumstances or at a Member State's request. PSOs thus became a formally recognised instrument of continental policy rather than an exceptional extension

of African diplomacy.[7]

However, the new framework did not envisage the AU replacing the UN. The PSC Protocol situates African peace and security action within the UN Charter, recognizes the Security Council's primacy and provides for cooperation with the UN and other international organisations. The emerging model was therefore one of greater African responsibility and operational agency, not institutional separation from the UN.

4.2. The Expansion of AU Peace Support Operations

Following the transition from the OAU to the AU, the Union deployed an increasingly wide range of PSOs. The African Union Mission in Burundi (AMIB), deployed in 2003 before the PSC became operational in March 2004, marked an early step in this expansion. It was followed by the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) in 2004, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in 2007, the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) in 2012 and the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) in 2013.

Alongside these missions, the AU also authorised ad hoc operations, including the Regional Cooperation Initiative against the Lord's Resistance Army (RCI-LRA) in 2011, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram in 2015 and the G5 Sahel Joint Force in 2017. These deployments reflected Africa's growing exposure to terrorism and other asymmetric threats, which increasingly pushed African leaders towards more robust, enforcement-oriented responses.

4.3. The Limits of Ambition

However, financial and operational constraints led to transitions to UN operations in four cases: in Burundi, AMIB was re-hatted as the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB) in June 2004; in Darfur, AMIS transferred authority to the AU–UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) in December 2007; in Mali, AFISMA transferred authority to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in July 2013; and in the Central African Republic, MISCA transferred authority to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) in September 2014. In Somalia, by contrast, AMISOM (2007–2022) and its successors, the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia – ATMIS (2022–2024) and the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia –AUSSOM (since 2024), operated with substantial UN logistical support funded through assessed contributions. These experiences underscored the persistent gap between the AU's operational ambitions and its capacity to finance and sustain missions independently.

This dependence renewed the AU's push for more predictable access to UN assessed contributions. The underlying argument was that African-led operations often respond rapidly to crises where deploying a UN operation is not feasible, thereby contributing to the Security Council's primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. Adopted unanimously in December 2023, Resolution 2719 established a framework under which eligible AU-led operations, authorized by the Security Council and under AU command and control, may receive up

7 *Wane, 'L'Union africaine à l'épreuve des opérations de soutien à la paix'.*

to 75 per cent of their annual budget from UN assessed contributions, with the remainder jointly mobilized by the AU and UN. The framework also provides for joint strategic assessment, planning, decision-making and reporting, coherent political strategy, and compliance with human rights and international humanitarian law, conduct and accountability. Despite efforts to apply it to AUSSOM, it had yet to be operationalised for any mission by October 2026.

Against this background, the PSC communiqué of 27 April 2026 on peace support operations in Africa is significant in the context of the evolving division of labor between the AU and the UN. It reiterates the imperative for the Security Council to assume its responsibilities for promoting peace and security in Africa, including deploying peacekeeping operations where required and adequately resourcing them to fulfill their mandates effectively. At the same time, it underscores the need to provide the requisite support to AU-led operations where UN missions are not feasible. The communiqué thus reaffirms the centrality of UN peacekeeping in responding to conflicts in Africa, which the AU aims to complement and reinforce rather than displace.

V. RETHINKING THE FUTURE OF UN PEACE OPERATIONS

The renewed African call for UN peacekeeping operations comes at a time when the United Nations itself faces profound political and operational challenges. Political processes are increasingly protracted, leaving missions deployed for years without a clear political end state or a realistic prospect of completing their mandates. Host-state consent, once treated as a relatively stable basis for deployment, is increasingly contested, withdrawn or subject to continuous renegotiation. Restrictions on freedom of movement and other administrative and operational impediments, as well as challenging security environments, further constrain mission' ability to implement their mandates. As a consequence of divisions within the Security Council, mandates are often built around the minimum level of agreement among its members rather than a shared, strategic vision of what a mission should achieve.

These political and operational constraints are compounded by a deepening financial crisis. Late or non-payment of assessed contributions has forced the United Nations to impose spending restrictions and reduce both uniformed personnel and civilian staff. Missions are therefore expected to deliver complex mandates in difficult environments while facing uncertainty over the resources available to carry them out. This creates a damaging gap between the expectations placed on peace operations and the means provided to fulfill them, potentially weakening morale, credibility and the confidence of host populations.

These developments are unfolding against a wider transformation of the international environment, marked by geopolitical tensions and rivalry among major powers, competing interpretations of some fundamental principles and values, and the growing prominence of sovereignty-centered discourses. Such discourses have gained particular traction in the Sahel, but are not confined to it. At the same time, social media has transformed the relationship between

missions and the societies in which they operate. While it facilitates misinformation and disinformation, including campaigns that can undermine the legitimacy of international engagement, it also gives local actors greater access to information and strengthens their ability to challenge decisions and demand accountability.

No new UN peacekeeping operation has been established since 2014, even as the number of armed conflicts has reached historically high levels. The problem is therefore not a lack of situations in which international engagement might be needed, but the absence of the political agreement required to authorise new missions. This creates a fundamental dilemma as the AU calls for renewed UN engagement: how can the case for UN peacekeeping be reconciled with the political divisions, financial constraints, contested legitimacy and changing expectations that increasingly limit its use? Addressing this question requires confronting the political conditions under which peace operations can be authorised, accepted, adequately resourced and given a realistic prospect of making a difference.

Against this backdrop, two recent initiatives are particularly relevant: the independent study on *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models and Related Capabilities*,[8] prepared ahead of the 2025 UN Peacekeeping Ministerial in Berlin, and the Secretary-General's subsequent review of all forms of UN peace operations. Although different in scope and also in institutional status, both seek to identify how the United Nations can adapt its instruments to changing circumstances while preserving their political relevance and operational effectiveness.

The independent study, published in October 2024, was commissioned by the UN Department of Peace Operations to inform the 2025 Peacekeeping Ministerial in Berlin. It advocates a politically-focused, people-centered and modular approach, allowing missions to be tailored to different contexts and adapted as circumstances evolve. It identifies 30 plausible models for future peacekeeping. The study also stresses the need to invest in key capabilities, including planning, personnel, leadership, data and information management, and rapid deployment capabilities. It equally places emphasis on the importance of Security Council unity and leadership, support by neighboring countries and regional organisations, as well as on cooperation from host governments and other stakeholders and the need for them to demonstrate true commitment to peace.

The subsequent review of all forms of UN peace operations, requested by the Pact for the Future and submitted by the Secretary-General in July 2026, broadened the focus to encompass both peacekeeping operations and special political missions. Its central argument is that the UN must reset how it conceives and deploys these instruments to build and sustain peace, including continuing adaptation – 'to the new conflict environment, the new financial constraints faced by the United Nations and, critically, the new geopolitical realities'. The report sets out a number of recommendations and commitments across eight areas, including prioritizing peacemaking, preventive diplomacy and the pacific settlement of disputes,

8 El-Ghassim Wane, Paul D. Williams and Ai Kihara-Hunt, The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities (Independent Study commissioned by the United Nations Department of Peace Operations, October 2024).

establishing a new partnership with host states, developing focused and adaptable mandates, improving operational agility and cost-effectiveness, and strengthening cooperation with regional organisations.[9]

VI. TOWARDS COMPLEMENTARITY

Africa has a particular stake in the ongoing discussions on the future of UN peace operations. The continent hosts four of the ten current UN peacekeeping operations, including three of the largest remaining multidimensional missions. It is also likely to remain a major theatre for future peacekeeping deployments, should the political conditions for establishing new missions emerge.

The continent's interest in peacekeeping, however, extends beyond the immediate security needs of individual countries and subregions. In a world increasingly shaped by power asymmetries, geopolitical rivalry, and the renewed use of force and coercion outside the framework of the UN Charter, multilateralism is particularly important for African states, whose individual capacity to influence international outcomes remains limited. A functioning multilateral system provides a framework through which they can collectively articulate their interests, exercise political influence and mitigate the imbalances that characterise the global system. Peacekeeping is one of the most powerful practical expressions of multilateralism in action.

The United Nations, in turn, has a strong interest in a more effective partnership with the AU. African countries provide a substantial share of UN peacekeeping personnel, while the AU brings political relationships, contextual knowledge, regional legitimacy, and a rich normative and policy framework that can help shape responses to conflicts on the continent and ensure greater efficiency and effectiveness.[10]

Building on these shared interests, an enhanced role for UN peacekeeping in addressing Africa's peace and security challenges could revolve around the following elements:

First a more pragmatic division of labor between the AU and the UN – As illustrated by the examples discussed above, the experience of African-led PSOs has exposed a fundamental gap between political ambition and operational capacity. When the AU fully incorporated PSOs into its conflict management toolbox, the underlying expectation was that African states would mobilise substantially greater resources than they had hitherto, and that the UN would provide additional support when required. In practice, neither expectation has been fulfilled to the extent necessary to sustain large-scale operations. Despite the emphasis on African leadership and ownership, Member states' willingness to mobilise the necessary resources has not matched their political commitments. For its part, the UN, with the notable exception of Somalia, has not provided the level of support required by large-scale African operations in a sufficiently sustainable and predictable manner.

Nearly three years after its adoption, UN Security Council Resolution 2719 has yet

9 *Report of the Secretary-General on the Future of All Forms of UN Peace Operations.*

10 *El-Ghassim Wane, 'The Future of United Nations–African Union Peacekeeping Partnership: Practical Considerations for the Berlin Ministerial Conference', Special Research Report (Amani Africa Media and Research Services, May 2025).*

to be operationalized for any mission. Although the AU has demonstrated a willingness to act, including in demanding security environments, it has not acquired the predictable financing, logistical capacity and other capabilities required to independently deploy and sustain large missions. This reality needs to inform a pragmatic division of responsibilities.

As a general rule, the United Nations should remain the principal provider of peace operations requiring substantial and sustained military, logistical and financial resources, whether large-scale multidimensional missions or more narrowly focused deployments. Nearly eight decades of experience have enabled the UN to develop the systems, capabilities and support structures necessary to plan, deploy and sustain such operations—capacities that would be difficult, time-consuming and costly for the AU to replicate.

Consequently, the AU should focus its operational efforts on more limited deployments, such as those envisaged under the Cairo Mechanism, and small stabilisation missions that do not require UN practical involvement. It may also need, exceptionally, to undertake more robust peace enforcement or counterterrorism operations when circumstances demand responses that fall outside the remit of traditional UN peacekeeping, including in situations contemplated under Articles 4(h) and 4(j) of the Constitutive Act. Resolution 2719 provides a framework for predictable UN financing of eligible AU-led operations authorised by the Security Council. Moreover, the AU must recognise that enforcement and counterterrorism, however necessary in some circumstances, cannot by themselves resolve conflicts that are fundamentally political and often rooted in governance failures.

A clearer division of responsibilities would also allow the AU to concentrate more consistently on areas where it has a distinct comparative advantage: conflict prevention, mediation and the political management of crises. Its normative frameworks and institutional instruments provide entry points for engagement with governments and conflict parties, including in circumstances where questions of sovereignty might otherwise constrain external involvement.[11]

Second, a stronger strategic role for the AU – A more limited AU operational role should be accompanied by a much stronger strategic role in UN peace operations in Africa. The AU should be systematically involved from the earliest stages of conflict analysis and strategic assessment through the development of mandates, their periodic review, and decisions on mission transitions and exit. Resolution 2719, although designed to facilitate UN support for AU-led operations, offers a possible starting point for developing such an approach. Its provisions for joint strategic assessment, consideration of response options and regular review could be adapted to establish more systematic AU involvement in shaping the strategic direction of UN-led missions. This should not prejudice the Security Council's authority and responsibilities under the UN Charter, or

11 Djinnit, Saïd, and Wane, El-Ghassim, 'Preface,' in African Non-Military Conflict Intervention Practices, edited by Antonia Witt, Christof Hartmann, and Ulf Engel (London: Routledge, 2026). The preface examines the factors that led to the predominance of military deployments in the AU's work and explores how the organization could reclaim a leading role in peacemaking by drawing on the tools and practices employed during the first decade and a half of its existence.

the Secretariat's prerogative to determine which recommendations it submits to the Council. In return, the AU's involvement should carry a strong expectation of sustained political support for UN missions and their agreed objectives.

Africa's representation on the Security Council, through the A3 (the three African members of the Council), remains an important channel for articulating continental perspectives. However, it cannot fully compensate for the deficit in representation arising from a Council composition that no longer adequately reflects contemporary global realities and perpetuates the historical injustice suffered by Africa. A more structured AU role, along the lines indicated above, would help bridge this gap, connect the Council's deliberations with regional assessments and potentially mitigate the effects of geopolitical divisions among its members when considering African issues. It would also enable the AU to bring its normative framework to bear more systematically on host countries and conflict parties, and to use its political standing to encourage dialogue, compromise and negotiated solutions.

This requires a change in how the AU views UN missions deployed on the continent. Rather than treating them principally as UN instruments, the AU should regard them as shared undertakings in which it has a substantial political stake. African ownership need not imply command or control; it means taking greater responsibility for the strategic environment in which missions operate, supporting their political objectives and helping to resolve the obstacles they encounter. When a UN mission succeeds, the host country and the continent at large are the principal beneficiaries. When it fails, they bear a substantial part of the consequences. The AU should therefore be invested in the success of these missions from their inception.

Third, more focused mandates – Equally important, if countries facing crises are to request UN peacekeeping and missions are to succeed once deployed, is the need for more focused and realistic mandates. In the current international environment, marked by the rise of sovereignty-centered-discourse and heightened sensitivity to external involvement, missions with broad and ambitious mandates may be particularly difficult to negotiate and sustain. More focused mandates, with clear priorities and achievable objectives, may be easier for host countries to accept, for the Security Council to agree on and for the UN to resource in the current fiscal climate. The aim is not to make missions smaller at any cost, but to align their responsibilities and resources with the realities of each context and the results they can reasonably be expected to achieve. This does not rule out multidimensional missions, which should remain an option where needed and where political conditions permit.

The independent study on *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models and Related Capabilities* offers a practical basis for this approach. In collaboration with the AU, the UN Secretariat should present the models it proposes more proactively to African countries, explaining their potential applications and the conditions for their successful implementation. Joint outreach should also be undertaken towards the Security Council and the PSC to familiarise both bodies with the range of options available to respond to peace and security challenges.

Fourth, managing host-state consent – This is among the most delicate challenges facing UN missions in Africa. Two particularly sensitive issues are restrictions on freedom of movement, which constrain mandate implementation, and human rights reporting, which can generate political friction, especially in divided societies. The AU can help address both through sustained, discreet engagement with host authorities, resolving disputes before they escalate and preserving the conditions necessary for missions to fulfill their mandates.

On freedom of movement, AU involvement can reframe restrictions from a bilateral dispute between a mission and its host government into a matter of shared African concern. The success of UN missions is inherently in Africa's interest, as it contributes to peace and stability on the continent. This matters also because African countries provide a substantial share of mission personnel, whose safety and security can be jeopardised when restrictions impede freedom of movement. The partnership must therefore extend beyond the political and strategic levels: the UN should systematically inform the AU of the practical challenges its missions face on the ground, enabling the AU to use its political relationships to address restrictions and reinforce the expectation that missions must be able to carry out their mandated tasks.

Human rights reporting presents a more complex challenge. In divided societies, reports documenting abuses may be perceived not as impartial efforts to establish facts and promote accountability, but as assigning collective blame, legitimising one side's narrative or threatening the standing of those associated with state institutions.[12]

Reporting must remain objective and independent, but findings should be situated within a broader understanding of conflict dynamics and linked to efforts to prevent further abuses and advance political solutions. The AU can draw on its own human rights instruments and Member States' commitments to frame respect for human rights not merely as an 'external' demand, but as an obligation grounded in African-agreed principles. Coordinated AU-UN engagement can encourage national ownership, constructive discussion and meaningful follow-up without compromising reporting independence or diluting mandate requirements.

Fifth, sustaining peace through political processes and long-term governance efforts – Peacekeeping requires a viable political process and sustained by efforts to address governance issues that often are at the core of conflicts on the continent. Neither the AU nor the UN can rely on its influence alone in an increasingly transactional international environment, where external actors pursue competing interests and conflict parties exploit divisions among mediators. Their leverage must therefore be pooled

12 This argument resonates with Mahmood Mamdani's critique of the tendency to approach political violence through a binary distinction between perpetrators and victims, without adequately accounting for the political and historical context in which violence occurs. Mamdani develops this argument in relation to justice and accountability. Similar considerations arise in human rights reporting in deeply divided societies, where the presentation and interpretation of abuses can have significant political consequences. See Mahmood Mamdani, 'The Logic of Nuremberg,' London Review of Books, Vol. 35, No. 21, 7 November 2013.

through coordinated political strategies, consistent messaging and appointment of joint envoys where appropriate. This cooperation should also extend to long-term prevention, drawing on the AU's normative framework on governance, democracy and human rights to address the structural drivers of conflict. The challenge is to connect the AU's political and normative leverage with the UN's operational capabilities, legitimacy and resources. Together, they can combine responses to immediate threats with sustained efforts to address the political and governance failures that make peace difficult to achieve and sustain.

VII. CONCLUSION

Africa's experience with peacekeeping has expanded the continent's political agency and capacity to respond to conflict, from the OAU's early efforts and the 1993 Mechanism to the establishment of the AU and the development of African-led PSOs. It has also exposed the limits of regional action without adequate capabilities and sustainable financing.

A more sustainable future for UN peacekeeping in Africa rests on a clearer division of responsibilities within a stronger AU–UN partnership. The United Nations should remain the principal provider of peacekeeping, drawing on its established operational capabilities, experience and access to sustained resources, particularly for large-scale and resource-intensive missions. The AU, in turn, should have a more strategic role in shaping international responses to African conflicts. Its political relationships, regional legitimacy and understanding of conflict dynamics can help ensure that UN engagement is better grounded in African realities, while its own operational deployments remain focused on areas where they are most appropriate and feasible.

The future of peacekeeping in Africa will depend on translating this division of responsibilities into a more effective partnership, with focused mandates, skillful management of host state consent, and renewed emphasis on peacemaking and long-term peace-building, particularly in addressing the governance failures and political grievances that fuel conflict. Stronger African agency should reinforce, not substitute for, international responsibility; equally, the UN's central operational role should not leave the AU merely reacting to decisions designed elsewhere.

The objective is a more genuinely complementary multilateralism: one in which the UN remains the principal provider of peacekeeping, while the AU helps shape its political direction and brings its regional influence to bear. This is not simply about making peacekeeping work better. It is also about keeping collective security viable in an international order undergoing profound transformation.

@Africa_amani
www.amaniafrica-et.org

MEDIA AND RESEARCH SERVICES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

El-Ghassim Wane was Acting Deputy Head of the AU Conflict Management Centre and then Head of its Conflict Management Division (2001–2009), before becoming Director of the AU Peace and Security Department. He subsequently served as UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping, AU Chief of Staff, and as UN Special Representative for Mali and Head of MINUSMA.

ABOUT AMANI AFRICA

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Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft Confédération suisse Confederazione Svizzera Confederaziun svizra
Ambasáid na hÉireann Embassy of Ireland
Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

ADDRESS

On the Corner of Equatorial Guinea St. and ECA Road, Zequala Complex,
7th Floor, Addis Ababa
Tel: +251118678809
Mobile: +251944723204 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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