



## The Future of African Peace Operations: Time to Adjust the Operational Design

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In 2015, the *African Standby Force* (ASF), a key component of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) is meant to reach full operational capability. More than a decade ago, in line with the growing political ambitions of African states to play a stronger role in relation to peace and security on the continent, African Union (AU) members decided to establish their own rapidly deployable, multi-dimensional peace operations capability. Despite significant progress attained the development of the ASF has been uneven over the course of the past decade. Unsatisfied with these delays, African states through the African Union (AU) Assembly in 2013 mandated the establishment of the *African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises* (ACIRC), intended to provide the AU with a quick reaction force, as a temporary stop-gap until the ASF was ready. Neither the ASF nor the ACIRC however will be able to provide Africa sufficiently with the peace support operations capabilities it requires. What is needed therefore is an adjustment of the operational design for African peace support operations which better corresponds to the realities and needs of the African continent.

### The Plan to Create an ASF

Established in 2003 through the adoption of the “Policy Framework for the Establishment of the African Standby Force and the Military Staff Committee”, the ASF was to consist of five regional standby capabilities comprising approximately 5,000 personnel each, which would be on standby in their regions of origin and be made available to the AU for deployment when mandated to do so by the AU *Peace and Security Council* (PSC). The development of a *Rapid Deployment Capability* (RDC) of 2,500

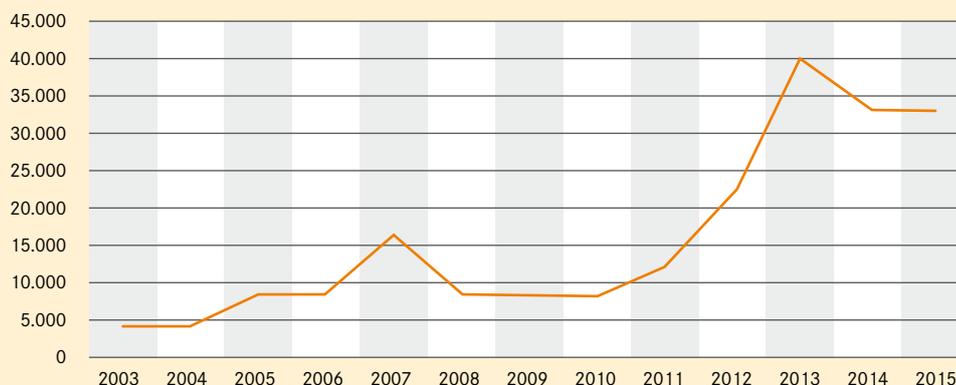
personnel per region was also envisioned, which would allow for the more rapid deployment of an operation in emergency situations. The development of these five standby capabilities was entrusted to three *Regional Economic Communities* (RECs)<sup>1</sup> and two new *Regional Mechanisms* (RMs)<sup>2</sup> which were established specifically for the purposes of developing the ASF.

There was not much time to develop the required capabilities however, as the same year as the ASF was established, the AU was already deploying its first peace support operation, the *African Union*

<sup>1</sup> The RECs involved in the ASF project are the *Economic Community of Central African States* (ECCAS), the *Economic Community of West African States* (ECOWAS) and the *Southern African Development Community* (SADC).

<sup>2</sup> The RMs established for the ASF are the *Eastern African Standby Force* (EASF) and the *North African Regional Capability* (NARC).

AU Authorised Uniformed Personnel Strength for PSOs (excl. UNAMID)



*Mission in Burundi (AMIB)*. Between 2004 and 2015 the AU deployed operations or mandated regional deployments to Darfur, Somalia, the Comoros, against the Lord’s Resistance Army in Eastern Central Africa, to Mali, to the Central African Republic and against Boko Haram in West Africa. Between 2013 and 2015, an average of 30,000 – 40,000 uniformed personnel were serving in African-led peace support operations per annum. In addition, African contributions of uniformed personnel to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations have increased from around 10,000 personnel per annum in 2003 to over 35,000 by 2013, the vast majority of which are deployed in operations on the African continent.

### Four Deployment Models

The deployment of these capabilities over the course of the past decade has not, however, followed the original ASF concept. Instead of a model of regional standby capabilities being activated and deployed when required, four distinct models of deployment have developed.

**1. AU-REC/RM model:** | The deployments in Mali (2013) and the CAR (2013) most closely followed the original ASF model, where RECs/RMs are largely responsible for generating the capabilities required for an operation and the REC/RM and the AU share deployment and management responsibilities, or where a

regional operation is first launched and then transitioned into an AU operation. While these deployments did not strictly adhere to the original ASF concept, they do largely follow the model envisaged a decade ago.

**2. AU-TCC/PCC model** | The deployments in Darfur (2004) and Somalia (2007) tended to follow more of a UN approach to peacekeeping, where the AU mandated the deployment of an operation, and individual *Troop Contributing Countries* (TCCs) and *Police Contributing Countries* (PCCs) were approached directly by the AU Commission to contribute capabilities as required. As such, contributions were sought from among the member states based on the mandate and the required capabilities.

**3. AU-Lead Nation model**<sup>3</sup> | The deployments in Burundi (2003) and the Comoros (2008), as well as the pre-AU deployments undertaken by ECOWAS in Liberia and Sierra Leone, tended to largely follow the lead nation concept, where individual countries with key strategic interests provided the framework role for the conduct of an operation. A few other contributing countries operated alongside, and were heavily reliant on the lead nation. This was also the model used when the Somalia mission was first deployed.

**4. AU-authorized Coalitions**<sup>4</sup> | The deployments which have been mandated against

<sup>3</sup> The concept of lead nations, as a stop-gap measure pending the establishment of regional standby force arrangements, was provided for in the ASF Policy Framework. African Union (2003). Policy Framework for the Establishment of the African Standby Force and the Military Staff Committee. p.17.

<sup>4</sup> The concept of coalitions of the willing was also introduced in the ASF policy framework of 2003. See p.17.



the Lord's Resistance Army (*Regional Task Force*) and Boko Haram (*Multi-National Joint Task Force*) have followed a different model altogether, where the AU has authorised coalitions of countries affected by a specific conflict with regional dimensions or a conflict driven by a group operating on a cross-border basis to take collective action to address the respective threat being faced. Under this model, the AU authorises and provides limited forms of support to operations which are planned and undertaken by a coalition of the directly affected countries.

### Slow Development of the ASF and the Establishment of the ACIRC

Despite the significant growth in African peace operations, the development of the ASF has been largely uneven across the five regions. Some regions have made greater progress than others, and the deployment of operations has not adhered to the original model envisaged for ASF deployments, as highlighted above. In 2013 an AU-mandated *Independent Panel of Experts* released a report noting that significant shortcomings, gaps and obstacles needed to be addressed if the ASF was to reach full operational capability by the end of 2015. The most critical areas which needed to be addressed included clarifying and simplifying the mandating and decision-making processes for operations, strengthening the ASF planning elements at the level of the AU Commission and the regions, converting pledged capabilities into deployable capabilities, and developing the necessary mission support architecture that would strengthen the deployment of operations and would support them once in the field. Through making the right investments in these areas, the Panel argued, it might be possible for the AU and the RECs/RMs to attain full operating capability for the ASF, as originally conceived, by the end of 2015.

Before the Panel had submitted its report on the ASF however, the AU had already taken a decision. Dissatisfied with the delays in the development of the ASF, several of them lobbied for the establishment of a new intervention mechanism

based on coalitions of the willing, which could be rapidly mobilized to intervene when mandated to do so. Accordingly, ACIRC was established in May 2013. The ACIRC was intended to provide the AU with a flexible and robust force made available directly by member states, on a voluntary basis, to be deployed rapidly to respond more effectively to emergency situations, within the framework of the APSA.

Three significant differences from the ASF were meant to make the ACIRC a more rapidly deployable capability:

1. Whereas the ASF relies on member states pledging capabilities to regions, which in turn make these available to the AU when required, the ACIRC relies on member states pledging capabilities directly to the AU, bypassing the regions;
2. While the ASF is a multi-dimensional capability which can be deployed across a range of scenarios, the ACIRC is a relatively smaller military force intended to be deployed in an intervention context only; and
3. Whereas the ASF operates on the basis of funding and support arrangements with non-African partners, the ACIRC is intended to be an exclusively African undertaking, with operating costs borne by the AU member states and the contributing countries themselves, and support arrangements provided largely by the contributing countries.

By January 2014 the ACIRC was declared ready for operations, and AU member states handed authority for the authorization of ACIRC operations to the AU PSC, by which stage 13 countries had joined the initiative.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, the AU has emphasised that the ACIRC should be seen not as a separate initiative that undermines the ASF, but as a transitional arrangement designed to expedite the operationalization of the ASF and its RDC, and has stressed the need for harmonisation of the various concepts. What is largely missing to date, however, is clarity on how this is to be achieved.

<sup>5</sup> Algeria, Angola, Burkina Faso, Chad, Egypt, Liberia, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Sudan, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda are all contributors to ACIRC.

## A New Understanding of the ASF

In 2013 the Panel which reviewed the ASF attempted to make a contribution to this discussion when it called for the establishment of a high-level strategic review of African peace operations and the development of the ASF, which could serve as the basis for the development of a new strategic vision for African peace operations. This recommendation was initially endorsed by the AU Assembly, but its implementation has been rather slow to take off. Nevertheless, a crucial part of such an exercise would be to revise the ASF concept, establishing a new vision for peace support operations in Africa. A key component of this exercise would be to differentiate between the *development* of capabilities and their *deployment* when required.

Past experience has shown that the ASF has proven extremely useful as a framework for the development of peace support operations capabilities on the African continent. Indeed, the ASF has provided the framework which brings together the AU Commission, the RECs/RMs, member states, training centres and partners in a collective effort which might otherwise not have existed. This collective ASF effort of developing common doctrine, setting training standards, conducting exercises, developing rosters and verifying pledged capabilities has, coupled with bi-lateral peacekeeping training programmes such as those funded by France (RECAMP), the United States (*African Contingency Training and Assistance/ACOTA*) or the UK (*British Peace Support Team/BPST*) contributed greatly to increasing African capabilities over the course of the past decade. As such, the ASF represent a hugely important initiative to develop capabilities which can be made available for deployment for African or UN peace operations when required. However, as noted above, the deployment of these capabilities has not followed the original model as envisaged for the ASF. Accordingly, based on the lessons learned from the past decade, the ASF strategic vision should be adjusted to fit practical

realities, and to provide a more flexible, and realistic, framework for future African peace support operations.

## Harmonised Concepts and Capabilities, Different Deployment Models

The conceptual development of the ASF appears to not have kept pace with the realities of African peace support operations, and the ACIRC seems to have been conceptualised somewhere between the AU-REC/RM, the AU-TCC/PCC and the AU-lead nation models, embracing the experiences of none fully. Importantly, the lessons learned by other multilateral efforts to establish standby capabilities, such as the UN's SHIRBRIG (*Standby High-Readiness Brigade*) or the Helsinki Headline Goals and the EU *Battle Groups*, all of which have achieved decidedly mixed results, have not been seriously debated at the AU. Similarly, the recognition that multilateral rapid reaction capabilities are extremely challenging to establish, maintain and deploy, also needs to be factored more seriously into the AU's thinking on the ACIRC. The fact that France appears to be one of the most active rapid responders on the African continent at present does not appear to be a sustainable solution.

What is required, therefore, is a new operational design for the ASF which recognises that the model of the AU working with the regions and member states in different ways at different times is key to success, and that no single operational model will satisfy all deployment requirements. Investing in the development of the required capabilities across deployment scenarios, and in the ability of the AU and the regions to deploy those capabilities in different ways at different speeds, depending on the need, will be key to the future of African peace operations.

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