

SPECIAL RESEARCH REPORT

THE FUTURE OF UNITED NATIONS – AFRICAN UNION PEACEKEEPING PARTNERSHIP: PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE BERLIN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

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I. INTRODUCTION *

The [8th Ministerial Peacekeeping Conference](#), with ‘The Future of Peacekeeping’ as its overarching theme, will take place in Berlin, Germany, from 13 to 14 May 2025. This event, which will bring together ministers of defense and foreign affairs from United Nations (UN) member states and other senior officials from governments and intergovernmental organizations, is part of the process launched after the 2015 Leaders’ Summit to strengthen support for UN Peacekeeping. The most recent Ministerial took place in Accra, Ghana, in December 2023.

Building on the independent study on [‘The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models and Related Capabilities’](#)—commissioned by the UN Department of Peace Operations on behalf of Germany and the other co-chairs of the Ministerial Process,¹ the Berlin discussions will be of particular relevance for Africa. Indeed, the continent continues to be at the forefront of both peacekeeping challenges and innovations in peace operations, hosting the majority of current UN operations.

This report outlines what could constitute Africa’s key messages to the Berlin Ministerial Conference, informed by the continent’s extensive experience with peacekeeping operations and the imperative to harness the complementarity between UN and African Union (AU) efforts, while also situating the debate on the future of peacekeeping within the broader context of an evolving multilateral system. It then proceeds to highlight specific steps for enhancing the UN-AU partnership, drawing directly from the conclusions of the study on the future of peacekeeping. In its concluding section, the report underscores the relevance of peacekeeping to today’s peace and security challenges while continuing to adapt to remain fit for purpose, as well as its significance as an essential component of the very multilateral architecture that, in spite of its shortcomings, nonetheless offers Africa its most effective platform for advancing its agenda and interests on the global stage.

**A shorter version of this report has been published by ACCORD under the title ‘Peacekeeping as Multilateralism: An African Perspective for Berlin’—<https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/peacekeeping-as-multilateralism-an-african-perspective-for-berlin/>*

¹ Wane, El-Ghassim, Williams, Paul D., & Kihara-Hunt, Ai. (2024). ‘Independent Study on the Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities. New York: United Nations Department of Peace Operations.’ https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/future_of_peacekeeping_report_rev30jan_1.pdf

II. THE FUTURE OF PEACEKEEPING: AFRICA'S POTENTIAL KEY MESSAGES IN BERLIN

As African delegations prepare for the Berlin discussions, they can bring valuable perspectives informed by direct experience with peacekeeping operations across the continent. Their contributions take on particular significance at this critical moment when peacekeeping faces renewed scrutiny and challenges to its relevance. Since 2014, no major UN peacekeeping operation has been established despite numerous situations that may have warranted deployments, while existing missions confront mounting operational challenges, stalled peace processes due notably to parties' lack of commitment, and ever-widening expectation gaps. Further complicating matters, some host countries have withdrawn their consent, requesting that missions deployed on their territory depart, and divisions within the Security Council make it increasingly difficult to forge unified support for authorized operations.

African delegations at the Berlin Ministerial Conference can bring valuable perspectives informed by direct experience with peacekeeping operations across the continent. Africa hosts the majority of UN missions and has been at the forefront of both peacekeeping challenges and innovations in peace operations.

Against this backdrop of challenges, three fundamental points deserve emphasis.

First, peacekeeping works. Academic studies consistently demonstrate that it is a cost-effective way to reducing armed conflict and protecting lives. It also strengthens national sovereignty, not only because it accompanied decolonization processes in the past, but also because it can ultimately help states recover the exercise of their basic functions—and that is the very essence of sovereignty.²

The real-world impact of peacekeeping is particularly visible in several African countries. Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and Liberia stand as compelling examples where missions, building on achievements made by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) with the AU support, have helped transform conflict zones into more stable societies. Even in situations where there was no peace to keep as such and amidst huge operational constraints, the positive impact of peacekeeping was evident, as shown in the Sudanese region of Darfur,³ especially when compared to the current situation, and in areas in Mali where MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali) had a presence, in addition to the multifaceted support it extended to various processes in the country.⁴ This observation also applies to AU operations, as demonstrated in Somalia where, despite persistent challenges, the AU

² *Ibid*, 7-9.

³ Mamiya, Ralph and Wibke, Hansen. 2020. 'Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID).' Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. https://www.nupi.no/content/pdf_preview/28357/file/EPON_UNAMID_Report.pdf

⁴ United Nations Secretary-General. 2023a. 'Internal Review of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.' January. S/2023/36. 4-10. <https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/n2301648.pdf>

mission, under different iterations, has allowed meaningful progress in that country's stabilization since 2007.⁵



A UN peacekeeper at a landing strip then under construction by MINUSMA in Kidal, Mali, 11 August 2022

Asserting that peacekeeping works is not to overlook some of its most serious failures, neither is it to overstate what it can achieve or to ignore its limitations. Ultimately though, missions operate under specific principles—consent, impartiality, and restricted use of force—which distinguish them from peace enforcement, even if, at times, the boundaries between them become blurred. This means peacekeeping missions should not be expected to function as war-fighting machines. Their success primarily depends on the willingness of host nations to cooperate and the engagement of all parties in peace processes, as well as on sustained support from the UN Security Council and the broader international community.⁶

5 Williams, Paul D. 2018. 'Assessing the Effectiveness of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).' Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.

https://www.cccpa-eg.org/pdf_read_download.php?type=read&newFileName=Assessing+the+Effectiveness+of+the+African+Union+Mission+in+Somalia+%28AMISOM%29&file=1385_23050047.pdf

6 Wane, Williams, and Kihara-Hunt. (2024). *The Future of Peacekeeping*, 10.

Second, UN and AU operations are complementary pillars of a shared multilateral architecture, each bringing distinct strengths rather than competing alternatives. With the significant progress made by the AU in peace operations since their inception in the mid-1990s, a perspective has emerged that AU operations could potentially substitute for UN operations, with the UN relegated to a support provider. This view has gained particular traction in the context of asymmetric threats, including terrorism and other forms of armed conflict, where traditional peacekeeping faces significant challenges.

The reality, however, is that neither institution should be viewed as a substitute for the other, but rather as essential partners in a comprehensive security framework. As stressed in the study on the future of peacekeeping,⁷ the UN maintains significant comparative advantages when assessed against any other alternative—notably the convening power arising from the UN's global reach and the authority bestowed upon the Security Council; predictable financing (challenges notwithstanding); specialized expertise, including the ability to conduct joint military, police and civilian activities and sustain them with a wide range of operational support services; and unmatched logistical capabilities and accountability mechanisms—while the AU faces persistent capability gaps and funding uncertainties, a situation that is unlikely to change given the current global environment. For its part, the AU has a demonstrated willingness to deploy missions in asymmetric environments or to carry out other types of robust operations.

7 Wane, Williams, and Kihara-Hunt. (2024). *The Future of Peacekeeping*, 12-14.

As a result of this, a sound division of labor will have the AU focus its efforts on operations the UN is less inclined to undertake (robust peace enforcement missions and counterterrorism operations, ideally with UN support in line with [Security Council resolution 2719 \(2023\)](#) and, in any event, with full UN political backing), and on smaller stabilization operations that may not warrant full UN deployment and for which the AU could leverage its rich normative framework on governance, legally-agreed entry points, and political legitimacy to overcome the barrier of national sovereignty. Some of the models identified in the study (see Figure 1 below for the full list of models) actually create opportunities for the AU, as their smaller scale and focused nature make them more financially viable than traditional large missions. It is crucial to keep in mind that enforcement operations alone cannot resolve Africa’s security challenges, which are fundamentally governance-related and political in nature. The UN’s capacity to deploy multidimensional missions integrating military, police, and civilian components remains essential for supporting transitions from conflict to sustainable peace.

This complementarity also means that the successes and failures of UN and AU peace operations are interconnected. When UN missions succeed, they validate multilateral approaches that benefit AU operations, which are based on the same principle of collective response to common challenges; when AU missions demonstrate results, they strengthen regional solutions that enhance UN credibility, given that regional arrangements such as the AU are part of the collective security architecture envisioned in the UN Charter, with Chapter VIII recognizing their role while operating within the broader framework of the Charter’s provisions on peace and security. Conversely, prominent failures in either system undermine confidence in the entire international peace architecture and discredit multilateral responses in favor of other avenues.

Third, and crucially, UN Peacekeeping is as an embodiment of multilateralism in action. It brings together key constituencies and draws its strength from their consensus: the permanent and elected members of the Security Council, major financial contributors, host countries, relevant regional actors such as the AU, and over 120 troop and police contributing countries (T/PCCs) that have provided over two million uniformed peacekeepers to date.

Among those T/PCCs, over 40 are African countries, some of which have deployed contingents and officers to missions outside Africa. This contribution should be understood as an expression of Africa’s commitment to multilateralism, driven not only by principle, but also by a clear-eyed assessment of the continent’s interests. In today’s interconnected world, multilateral frameworks—of which both



Figure 1: Models for future UN peacekeeping (Source: Wane, Williams, and Kihara-Hunt. (2024). *The Future of Peacekeeping*, 3)

UN and AU peace operations are vital expressions—remain the most effective tools for addressing complex security challenges. They enable Africa to engage from a position of collective strength, maximize the chances that its voice is heard in global decision-making, and to build the partnerships essential for sustainable peace.

III. ENHANCED AU-UN PEACEKEEPING PARTNERSHIP: BUILDING ON THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY ON THE FUTURE OF PEACEKEEPING

These core elements—the demonstrated effectiveness of peacekeeping, the complementary nature of UN and AU operations, and the importance of multilateralism for addressing global challenges—should guide the AU and UN efforts to devise practical and innovative ways to further strengthen their partnership. The study on the Future of Peacekeeping provides some ideas that will certainly be enriched by recommendations from the ongoing review of the peacebuilding architecture ([here](#) and [here](#)) and the planned review of all UN peace operations, as mandated in Action 21(b) of the [Pact for the Future](#) adopted by the General Assembly in September 2024.

The demonstrated effectiveness of peacekeeping, the complementary nature of UN and AU operations, and the importance of multilateralism for addressing global challenges should be the three core elements guiding the AU and UN efforts to further

strengthen their partnership.

Going forward, five priority areas deserve particular attention.

As an immediate priority, the AU and UN should strengthen their collaboration in support of ongoing UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. Their interests will be well served by this enhanced partnership: UN missions benefit from the AU (and its Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution—RECs/RMs) local knowledge, proximity to conflicts, and political legitimacy, while the AU has a direct stake in mission outcomes as the continent is both the immediate beneficiary of successes and the world region most affected by failures.

To deepen this cooperation, and as recommended in the study,⁸ the UN should constantly share information with the AU and its RECs/RMs about the activities of its missions, including both political and operational challenges (the AU should of course do the same about its peace and security initiatives). This should include regular and dedicated briefings to the Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the AU Commission to provide context, answer questions, and facilitate strategic alignment. It should also include seemingly small but symbolically significant steps like the formal transmission of Secretary-General's reports on the activities of peacekeeping operations deployed in Africa to the AU Commission and other actors—notwithstanding the fact that these are publicly available—signaling a further recognition of African actors as

⁸ Wane, Williams, and Kihara-Hunt. (2024). *The Future of Peacekeeping*, 47.

integral stakeholders of the peacekeeping enterprise.

The UN's extensive field presence in Africa provides multiple channels for this engagement: regional offices (United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel - UNOWAS, United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa - UNOCA), Special Envoys (Horn of Africa, Great Lakes Region), the UN Office to the AU (UNOAU), and, where no other relevant UN presence exists, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) country offices. At headquarters level, protection mandate holders—including Special Representatives for Children in Armed Conflict, Sexual Violence, and Prevention of Genocide—should be systematically incorporated into these briefing mechanisms. In sum, what is needed is a whole-of-UN approach that treats no step as too small in building meaningful partnerships with African institutions and actors, bringing their influence and regional knowledge to bear on the trajectory of UN peacekeeping operations, whose successes, as pointed out above, are critical for the continent's long-term stability.

There is clearly a profound yearning for change today among African populations—particularly the youth, who are increasingly empowered by access to social media, despite its associated risks. In this context, and building on the substantial progress already achieved, deeper cooperation with African stakeholders is imperative to enhance the legitimacy, effectiveness, and public perception of UN operations across the continent.⁹

⁹ For the articulation of the principle of legitimacy in the overall partnership between the AU and the UN, see African Union. 2012a. 'Report of the

The steps above, in turn, will foster a greater African 'ownership' of UN operations and increase the likelihood of the AU (and its RECs/RMs) stepping in to proactively support UN missions, by contributing to the resolution of practical challenges confronting them (restrictions to the freedom of movement and other related problems), engaging host countries on mandate implementation, and leveraging existing continental (and regional) frameworks on governance and human rights to enhance synergy with UN broader efforts.

The continent's support should also play out at the level of the Security Council. When the AU—particularly through the three African members (A3) of this organ—takes the lead in raising challenges confronting missions and adopt principled stances driven by its relevant normative and policy frameworks, it can potentially help shield these discussions from broader geopolitical tensions currently affecting the work of the Council, ensuring they are addressed on their own merits rather than being subsumed by unrelated global rivalries.

As the two organizations continue to work together to facilitate coordinated support to UN peacekeeping missions, they may also wish to consider, wherever feasible, embedding AU liaison missions within UN operations—ideally with varying levels of UN support. There are some precedents for this approach, including the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Liaison Mission in Ethiopia

Chairperson of the Commission on the Partnership Between the African Union and the United Nations on Peace and Security: Towards Greater Strategic and Political Coherence.' Peace & Security Council, 307th Meeting, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 9 January, 38. <https://archives.au.int/handle/123456789/8415>

and Eritrea (OLMEE), established following the ceasefire agreement signed by the two countries in Algiers in June 2000. OLMEE was authorized by the 68th Ordinary Session of the Central Organ of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution in July 2000 (the immediate predecessor of the PSC), with a mandate to assist and cooperate with the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), which had been deployed following UN Security Council Resolution 1312 (2000). The Security Council terminated UNMEE's mandate in July 2008, leading the AU to also end its mission.¹⁰ Such a mechanism would give the AU better insight into the unique role that UN peacekeeping missions play on the ground and a deeper appreciation of their operational environment and associated challenges, thus enabling it to extend tailored and effective support.

Relatedly, the UN should give consideration to involving the AU (and relevant RECs/RMs) in the strategic reviews it regularly conducts to assess its operations—whether internal, as was the case for MINUSMA,¹¹ or independent.¹²

¹⁰ Aboagye, Festus. 2001. 'Towards New Peacekeeping Partnerships in Africa? The OAU Liaison Mission in Ethiopia-Eritrea.' *African Security Review* 10(2); Wane, El-Ghassim. (2011). 'L'Union africaine à l'épreuve des opérations de soutien de la paix - entre innovations institutionnelles et contraintes opérationnelles'. In *Guide du maintien de la paix. L'Afrique et les opérations de paix, sous la direction de David Morin et Lori-Anne Théroux-Bénoni*, Outremont, QC: Athéna, 59-60.

¹¹ United Nations Secretary-General. 2023a. 'Internal Review of MINUSMA.'

¹² Forti, Daniel. (2021). *Independent Reviews of UN Peace Operations: A Study of Politics and Practice*. New York: International Peace Institute. <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/2110-Independent-Reviews-of-Peace-Ops.pdf>

This would represent a step further compared to the current practice of merely consulting these African actors in the countries where the reviews are taking place.

Building on established practices of Security Council permanent members, who often dispatch their own review missions to peacekeeping operations ahead of mandate renewal discussions, the AU would benefit from adopting similar approaches. Such AU-led assessment missions would provide African stakeholders with firsthand insights into operational realities, thereby strengthening Africa's substantive contributions to Security Council discussions. To maximize the impact of this approach, the PSC should systematically convene dedicated sessions prior to mandate renewals of UN missions in Africa—a practice previously limited primarily to UNAMID, given its hybrid status, and AMISOM (and its subsequent iterations), owing to its UN authorization and substantial support package funded through assessed contributions. These sessions, informed by the findings of the assessment missions, would enable the PSC to provide clear strategic direction to the A3, ensuring a coordinated and well-informed African position in Security Council deliberations.

The reviews could be conducted by technical experts alongside A3 representatives, creating a direct link between field operations and relevant African actors. Should financial constraints limit physical deployments, these assessments could be conducted remotely through virtual consultations, as was successfully done by some Council members in recent years.

Finally, another step, arguably a more modest one, would be for the UN, if not already done, to connect relevant AU officials to its internal telephone network, enabling them to directly and more efficiently reach UN mission leadership teams whenever needed, as well as embedded AU liaison offices where they would have been deployed.

Beyond these immediate steps, the AU and UN should jointly examine how to effectively leverage the peacekeeping models identified in the independent study, as part of their efforts to enrich and diversify their conflict management toolbox and ensure it remains suited to current and emerging peace and security challenges.

To recall, the study came up with thirty models, articulating each a desired strategic goal, a cluster of potential mandated tasks, and a brief list of related capabilities to enable their successful deployment. These include preventative deployments, atrocity prevention, and protection of civilians; ceasefire monitoring and observation, verification, and support for peace agreements; new state support, transitional administration, and election security and assistance; functional areas (DDR, SSR, policing, Rule of Law, counter organized crime, etc.); emergency humanitarian response, public health support, and natural disaster response; protection of infrastructure, natural resources and cultural heritage; cybersecurity and maritime security; and, finally, spatially-focused operations—regional and city security.¹³ Two considerations informed this approach: providing the Security Council—and this is also relevant to the AU PSC—with as many

options as possible when addressing particular situations and, thus, increasing the likelihood of consensus among its members; and helping potential host countries to have a better sense of the range of support the UN can offer to help them deal with peace and security challenges.

More specifically, the proposed exercise would involve assessing how the models could be used to address situations that are currently of concern on the continent, whether deployed singularly or in combination, and how they might serve as frameworks for mission initiation, expansion, or drawdown. There are important benefits that can accrue from this exercise. It can help determine which institution would be best positioned to lead specific types of operations and identify optimal ways to combine efforts based on the implementation modalities outlined in the study—sequenced, parallel, or joint and hybrid deployments. It can also enhance the capacity of both organizations to more effectively engage with their respective decision-making organs (Security Council and PSC) and member states about the expanded range of options available to them as they respond to peace and security concerns and threats.

Taking a step further, the AU and the UN could then, through joint scenario planning exercises, test these models against hypothetical crisis situations, developing practical deployment protocols while simultaneously preparing for coordinated responses. A similar exercise was conducted recently by the International Peace Institute.¹⁴

¹³ Wane, Williams, and Kihara-Hunt. (2024). *The Future of Peacekeeping*, 19-35.

¹⁴ Russo, Jenna & Tadesse, Bitania. (2025). 'Scenario-Based Planning and the Future of Peace Operations.' New York: International

While the study focused on operations conducted by the UN, it holds crucial lessons for the AU, particularly regarding capabilities needed to enhance mission effectiveness. For UN operations, the study identified several areas requiring increased investment, including planning, leadership, data management, strategic communications, rapid deployment capabilities, and peacekeepers security and welfare.

As the AU reviews the African Standby Force (ASF),¹⁵ these priority areas could inform its modernization efforts. The AU could also learn from UN initiatives addressing these gaps and seek necessary assistance as part of the partnership with the UN.

Similarly, the AU and the UN could work together to examine how the former might utilize a similar approach as the Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System (PCRS) to more effectively generate capabilities for its own operations, including through adjustments to meet specific needs in the African context. Thanks to pledges generated through the Peacekeeping Ministerial Process, the PCRS currently includes over 100 units that have been assessed by experts from the secretariat as meeting deployment standards. Some of these units are at the Rapid Deployment Level of the PCRS, with the contributing countries receiving a maintenance fee in exchange for agreeing to deploy to

Peace Institute, April. https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2503_Scenario-Based-Planningweb.pdf

¹⁵ Amani Africa. (2025). 'Update on the Operationalisation of the African Standby Force (ASF)'. January. <https://amaniafrica-et.org/update-on-the-operationalisation-of-the-african-standby-force-asf/>

any current or new UN peacekeeping operation within 60 days of request.¹⁶ Building on the PCRS would allow the AU to direct its energy and limited resources to other priority areas, ensure pledged units for the ASF undergo more stringent and thorough assessment, and enable the AU to more readily implement some of the peacekeeping models developed in the independent study, as new member state pledges are expected to factor in these models.

For peace keeping to work more effectively, the AU and the UN need to step up their peacemaking efforts.

No matter how well resourced a peacekeeping mission is, its ability to achieve lasting peace, a goal that goes beyond the intermediate objective of preserving ceasefires and protecting lives, is dependent on the commitment of local stakeholders to definitively turn the page of violence and seek political solutions to their grievances and differences. The international community can help through renewed peacemaking efforts and sustained support to missions. As put out by the UN Under Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, 'peacekeepers need peacemakers'.¹⁷

¹⁶ Wane, Williams, and Kihara-Hunt. (2024). *The Future of Peacekeeping*, 12.

¹⁷ Lacroix, Jean-Pierre. (2024). 'Peacekeepers Need Peacemakers: What the UN Owe the Blue Helmets.' *Foreign Affairs*, September.



'Peacekeepers need peacemakers'

Jean-Pierre Lacroix
UN Under-Secretary-General for
Peace Operations

In practical terms, there is a need for greater synergies and jointness of efforts between the two organizations. This could entail the appointment of a single envoy leading an AU-UN team (for instance, the late [Mohamed Sahnoun](#) served as UN-AU Special Representative for the Great Lakes region of Africa) or the appointment of separate envoys ([here](#) and [here](#)) who would then form a joint team. Other modalities could be explored, the key being to work closely together and lean on each other's comparative advantages. In today's complex mediation landscape, marked by the proliferation of initiatives spearheaded by individual countries, the only way for the AU and the UN to retain some level of influence and advance solutions that foster principles enshrined in their respective founding documents is to tighten their cooperation and act as much as possible in unison. Another option to be explored could be the establishment of jointly-led international contact groups or other similar structures, to help address the challenges associated with the increasingly fragmented peacemaking efforts.

In this context, the AU would benefit from strategically striking a better balance between the various conflict management tools provided for in the [PSC Protocol](#). It should effectively reinvest in prevention and peacemaking—areas where it possesses genuine comparative advantages thanks to its regional knowledge and political legitimacy. While peace support operations are necessary, they consume disproportionate organizational resources and attention. From my direct experience at the AU, we, at times, devoted overwhelming institutional bandwidth to peacekeeping logistics and funding challenges, inadvertently neglecting critical prevention opportunities and governance reforms that might have prevented conflicts from escalating or happening in the first place. A recalibrated approach would maximize the AU's impact across the conflict spectrum while complementing rather than duplicating UN efforts.¹⁸

In order to revamp its peacemaking and mediation efforts, the AU could usefully draw lessons from past experiences of the organization. Three practical tools widely used by the Commission and the PSC deserve mention in this context.

First, what could be referred to as PSC 'framework communiqués.' These relate to communiqués in which the PSC articulates a comprehensive solution to situations characterized by imminent risks of escalation, protracted impasses, and threatened transition processes, accompanied by realistic implementation timelines and clear expectations of

¹⁸ Wane, El-Ghassim. (2011). 'L'Union africaine à l'épreuve des opérations de soutien de la paix - entre innovations institutionnelles et contraintes opérationnelles,' 75.

behavior from parties, thus creating a new diplomatic landscape that constrains the parties' room for maneuver. This tool was effectively used by the PSC in its [communiqué of 24 April 2012](#) on the situation between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan. In that particular case, key elements that contributed to its effectiveness included: a balanced approach that addressed core interests of both Sudan and South Sudan while advancing continental norms; anchoring provisions in relevant AU legal instruments, which established clear compliance obligations; international reinforcement through UN Security Council resolution [2046 \(2012\)](#); immediate follow-up to prevent erosion of the new diplomatic reality; and institutional coherence between the AU Commission and the PSC, avoiding mixed signals that parties might have exploited.¹⁹

The second tool the AU could resort to involves establishing ad hoc conflict resolution mechanisms to expand its peacemaking capacity. This could take the form of high-level panels or committees composed of serving heads of state and government from diverse regions, deployed to address complex conflicts—such as the panel for [Côte d'Ivoire](#) and the ad hoc committee

¹⁹ African Union. 2012c. 'Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Implementation of the Peace and Security Council Communiqué PSC/MIN/COMM/3.(CCCXIX) of 24 April 2012 on the Situation Between Sudan and South Sudan.' Peace and Security Council, 327th Meeting at the Level of Heads of State and Government, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 14 July, Document PSC/AHG/4(CCCXXVII). <https://www.aupaps.org/en/article/report-of-the-chairperson-of-the-commission-on-the-status-of-implementation-of-the-peace-and-security-council-communicue-psc-min-comm-3-cccix-of-24-april-2012-on-the-situation-between-sudan-and-south-sudan>

on [Libya](#) (in January and March 2011, respectively). These structures leverage engagement at the highest political level to influence conflict parties. Alternatively, the AU could utilize independent panels of eminent personalities, typically former heads of state with substantial diplomatic experience and moral authority, exemplified by the [AU High-Level Panel on Darfur](#) (AUPD), established in 2008, and its successor—the [African Union High Level Implementation Panel](#) (AUHIP). Chaired by former President Thabo Mbeki and comprising former Presidents Abdulsalami Abubakar and Pierre Buyoya, this panel operated with considerable independence (being directly mandated by the PSC) while maintaining the necessary gravitas to engage both conflict parties and international stakeholders.

These mechanisms offer three strategic advantages: enabling direct communication of difficult truths to conflict parties; enhancing the AU's ability to engage effectively with key international stakeholders by deploying mediators who command attention at the highest level; and allowing the Commission to shape approaches to contentious issues while maintaining institutional distance from politically sensitive positions. While the ad hoc committee on Libya was ultimately not successful, it nevertheless allowed the AU to articulate a distinctly African position emphasizing political dialogue and inclusive transition, and to engage with key international stakeholders.

The third instrument that the AU could revive pertains to international contact groups or other similar structures established under its leadership or together with RECs/RMs, distinct from those jointly formed with the

UN, as mentioned above. The AU has established contact groups in two contexts: in response to unconstitutional changes of government to facilitate return to constitutional order, as seen in [Guinea](#) (2008) and [Madagascar](#) (2009), among other examples; and to address complex conflict situations requiring sustained international engagement, such as in [Central African Republic](#) (2013). The strategic objectives of these contact groups are twofold: to facilitate coordinated international engagement, preventing fragmented or contradictory approaches to complex crises; and to leverage the political, economic, and diplomatic influence of key international actors in support of AU positions and African-led solutions. This approach also reflected the AU's pragmatic recognition of its limitations. Despite its normative authority in addressing African crises, the AU often faces capacity and resource constraints that limit its enforcement abilities. By incorporating key international stakeholders into these structures, the AU can harness their leverage, while also diplomatically containing unilateral initiatives by partners by raising the political cost of engaging in such enterprises.

Finally, to sustain gains made by peacekeeping missions or make their deployment unnecessary, there should be, as called for by the Secretary-General in the New Agenda for Peace, a greater 'invest(ment), politically and financially, in prevention', one that 'go(es) beyond lip service'.²⁰ For the AU and the UN,

this means taking steps to more closely work together on issues of governance, as part of structural, long-term peace-building and prevention efforts, with the aim of consolidating peace where it has been achieved and preventing relapse into violence as well as the occurrence of conflict in the first place.

The goal would be to more effectively combine the UN significant technical and resource capacity, on the one hand, and the rich AU normative and policy framework on governance, democracy and human rights, on the other. This framework is based on a web of legal and policy instruments developed over the years and that form the foundation of the [African Governance Architecture](#) (AGA), conceived as a platform for dialogue and coordination among the concerned stakeholders. The instruments in question include the [OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa](#) (1969); the [African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights](#) (1981); the [African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child](#) (1990); the [Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa](#) (2003); the [African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption](#) (2003); the [African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance](#) (2007); the [African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa](#)—Kampala Convention (2009); the [African Charter on the Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration](#) (2011); the [African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Governance and Local Development](#) (2014); the [Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons](#) (2016); the [Protocol to the African](#)

²⁰ *United Nations Secretary-General. 2023b. 'Our Common Agenda, Policy Brief 9. A New Agenda for Peace.' New York: United Nations, July, 11. <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/08/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-peace-en.pdf>*

[Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa](#) (2018); and the [African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls](#) (2023).

There is no doubt that the efforts being undertaken by the AU would hugely benefit from the UN expertise and resources. Conversely, the different entities of the UN system engaged in various governance and stabilization endeavors in Africa would be far more effective if their efforts were systematically and explicitly linked to the relevant AU instruments. Advocacy anchored in African-developed instruments carries far greater legitimacy and effectiveness than when such an endeavor is perceived as being externally driven.

Such an enhanced partnership would focus on three areas.

First, support to individual African countries to implement the commitments made on the basis of African instruments and within African frameworks (as well as related UN instruments), including through the elaboration of national action plans.

Second, enhanced support to the AU Commission and relevant African institutions mandated to follow up various aspects of the continent's governance agenda (notably, the [African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights](#); the [African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights](#); the [African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child](#); the [African Peer Review Mechanism](#); and the [African Union Advisory Board on Corruption](#)) —the UN is well placed to extend complementary support that fosters African leadership

while helping translate normative and policy commitments into practical steps to advance good governance.

Third, dissemination of the AU instruments to political, civil society and other actors to increase their level of awareness of the commitments entered into by their countries and foster greater accountability.

IV. CONCLUSION – FOSTERING MULTILATERALISM THROUGH RENEWED SUPPORT TO UN PEACEKEEPING

In a world defined by geopolitical tensions and rivalries and confronted with heightened competition among various states scrambling for influence and pursuing national interests, the Berlin Conference offers an opportunity to rally the widest possible support for one of the most tested and enduring tools of multilateralism. As underlined in the independent study, peacekeeping has a demonstrated track record of bringing together a wide range of actors in a variety of forums and, as such, has the potential of mitigating some of today's challenges.²¹

Given the asymmetric distribution of power and profound disparities between nations and regions in the current international system, the multilateral system, for all its shortcomings, still offers the best way to advance the continent's interests. In this context, protecting and strengthening peacekeeping is more crucial than ever.

²¹ Wane, Williams, and Kihara-Hunt. (2024). *The Future of Peacekeeping*, 50.

Peacekeeping is undoubtedly going through challenging times. Yet even amid these difficulties, it remains an invaluable multilateral instrument that enables the international community to work together in addressing complex security challenges. For peacekeeping to retain its relevance, however, it must continue evolving to adapt to new conflict dynamics and operational environments. The modular approach articulated in the independent study offers a viable path forward. This should go hand in hand with efforts toward more streamlined processes and improved planning capabilities²².

With respect to Africa—a continent central to peacekeeping’s future as host to most current operations, a region that has historically demonstrated openness to UN deployments and where the need for operations is undeniable to help protect civilians, end conflicts, and foster peacebuilding—this evolution must entail continuously reinforcing African ownership by involving continental stakeholders as closely as possible in their design, implementation, and strategic orientation. Such inclusion would not only improve operational effectiveness and increase the prospects for success, but also anchor the continent more firmly within the broader multilateral system while simultaneously strengthening Africa’s own multilateral mechanisms for crisis management—institutional capacities that are critical to finding lasting solutions to the continent’s conflicts. Significant progress has already been made in building a strong AU-UN partnership. These efforts should be pursued and enhanced, with a focus on specific and concrete measures—such as those identified above—that would make

it possible to fully leverage the contextual knowledge, political legitimacy, and regional influence of African actors, including the AU, throughout the lifecycle of missions.

As the UN works to further integrate Africa into the peacekeeping enterprise, African institutions and member states must likewise recommit to strengthening the multilateral system that makes these operations possible. For Africa, the stakes could not be higher. In an international system marked by an asymmetric distribution of power and profound disparities between nations and regions, the multilateral system, for all its shortcomings and of which UN peacekeeping operations are a vivid expression, still offers the best way to advance the continent’s interests. In this context, protecting and strengthening peacekeeping, which also includes making it more effective, including through the judicious use of member states’ resources and ever greater accountability towards them, is more crucial than ever.

Looking toward Berlin, African representatives might find renewed relevance in the recommendations made by Salim Ahmed Salim, then OAU Secretary-General, in his July 1990 seminal report on the ‘Fundamental Changes Taking Place in the World and Their Implications for Africa—Proposals for an African Response’. Articulating how the continent should position itself on the international arena, he made the point that, while ‘the African response for the 1990s and beyond must, by and large, be inward-looking, in that its major preoccupation would be to build Africa’s inner strength,’ the continent ‘must (also) continue to court and nurture

22 *Ibid*

international solidarity.' In this respect, he underscored that 'the United Nations system remains ... the most important international forum through which Africa can advocate and promote its interests at the international level.' He further advocated that the continent 'must increase its support for the ideals of the United Nations...' and ensure that 'the focus of Africa's multilateral diplomacy and international negotiations must remain within the UN system.'²³

Three decades and a half later, these words of wisdom remain still relevant. They should inform African countries' contribution to the deliberations of the Berlin Ministerial Conference on the future of peacekeeping.

²³ Organization of African Unity. (1990). 'Report of the Secretary-General on the Fundamental Changes Taking Place in the World and Their Implications for Africa: Proposals for an African Response', 31-34.



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El-Ghassim Wane led the team that conducted the independent study on the Future of Peacekeeping, New Models and Related Capabilities. He served as Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Mali and head of MINUSMA, and assumed several other responsibilities in both the UN and the AU, including UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping and Director for Peace and Security at the AU Commission.

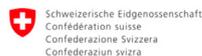
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Amani Africa acknowledges with appreciation the support of the Embassy of Canada, the Embassy of Ireland, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway and the Government of Switzerland for their support that contributed towards this report and our work in general.



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