

# The United Nations–African Union Partnership and the Protection of Civilians

Andrew E. Yaw Tchie and Lauren McGowan



**Cover Photo:** Flag-raising at the UNAMID headquarters in El Fasher, Sudan, May 27, 2012. Albert Gonzalez Farran/UN Photo.

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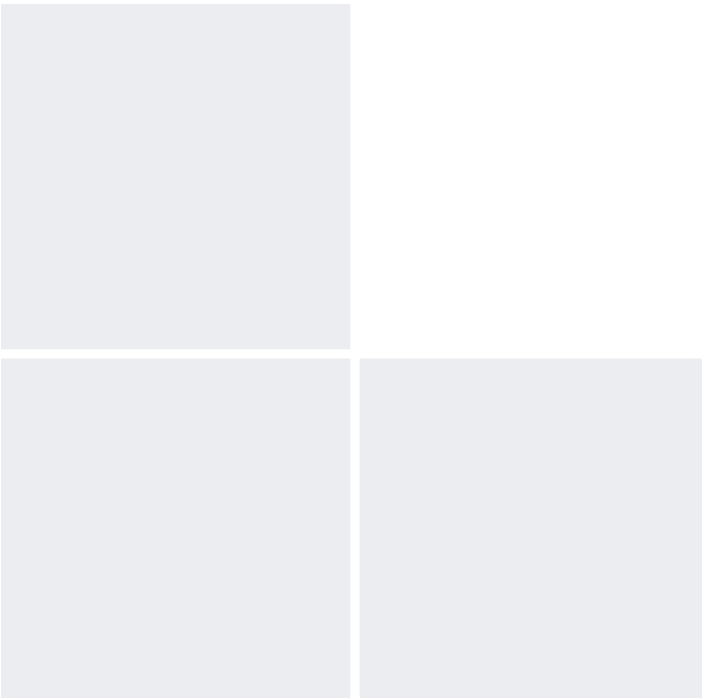
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## ABBREVIATIONS

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A3	three African members of the Security Council
AMIS	AU Mission in Sudan
AMISOM	AU Mission in Somalia
ASIs	ad hoc security initiatives
ATMIS	AU Transition Mission in Somalia
AU	African Union
AU PSC	AU Peace and Security Council
AUPSOs	AU peace support operations
AUSSOM	AU Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia
CCTARC	civilian casualties tracking, analysis, and response cell
CHM	civilian harm mitigation
CIMIC	civil-military cooperation cell
CONOPS	concept of operations
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DPO	UN Department of Peace Operations
FC-G5S	G5 Sahel Joint Force
IDP	internally displaced person
IHL	international humanitarian law
IHRL	international human rights law
MINUSCA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MINUSMA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MISAHEL	AU Mission for Mali and the Sahel
MNJTF	Multinational Joint Task Force
MONUSCO	UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC
OHCHR	UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PCC	police-contributing country

POC	protection of civilians
PSOD	AU Peace Support Operations Division
RECs	regional economic communities
RM	regional mechanisms
ROE	rules of engagement
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAMIDRC	SADC Mission in the DRC
SAMIM	SADC Mission in Mozambique
SEA	sexual exploitation and abuse
TCC	troop-contributing country
T/PCC	troop- and police-contributing country
UNOAU	UN Office to the AU

## Executive Summary

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The landscape of peace operations in Africa has transformed over the past decade, including a marked increase in African-led peace support operations (PSOs). This trend has coincided with the drawdown of four large UN peacekeeping operations in Africa since 2017, while no new UN peacekeeping operation has been mandated since 2014.

Since the early 2000s, the AU and UN have evolved distinct, albeit parallel, conceptual and operational approaches to the protection of civilians (POC). While there are similarities in how the two organizations conceptually understand POC, the UN and AU have different operational approaches, and it is unclear how these could or should converge in the future, whether in the context of joint operations or a broader partnership within peace operations settings.

The primary differences between UN and AU approaches to POC lie at the operational rather than the conceptual level. The UN views POC in peacekeeping as a whole-of-mission objective, with military, police, and civilian components prioritizing POC and proactively protecting civilians. The AU, by contrast, has come to view itself as contributing to the protection of civilians primarily by neutralizing armed groups and establishing a protective environment. In effect, the AU has focused on peace enforcement as a way to provide security to enable other actors, including the UN, to undertake longer-term programming.

As a result, UN peacekeeping operations and African-led PSOs each have different comparative advantages and limitations. First, the AU and UN are at different moments of institutionalizing POC. Second, African-led PSOs tend to be more able and willing to use force to respond to outbreaks of violence and to contain aggressors. Third, UN peacekeeping missions with POC mandates have more robust civilian and police components. Fourth, African-led PSOs have less sustainable and flexible financing than UN peacekeeping operations, which means their respective POC capacities differ. Finally, UN peacekeeping operations and African-led PSOs

have distinct entry points for linking POC to political processes.

To strengthen their partnership on POC moving forward, the two organizations should leverage these comparative advantages, acknowledge their respective limitations, and work toward an approach to POC that is tailored to each context. By enhancing existing mechanisms for collaboration through the 2017 UN-AU joint framework, both organizations can learn lessons from each other and refine their own approaches to better deliver protection outcomes. Based on the findings in this report, the following recommendations are made:

### Understandings of POC:

- The UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and AU Peace Support Operations Division (PSOD) should continue to facilitate understanding of their comparative advantages and challenges on POC.
- POC should be a central focus of efforts to implement the 2017 Joint Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security.
- UN DPO and AU PSOD should share lessons and build each other's capacity based on their relative strengths and comparative advantages.
- The AU compliance team should continue to support operations led by regional economic communities in adhering to the AU POC policy.

### Structures on POC:

- The UN and AU should create a joint lessons-learned mechanism in the UN Office to the AU to more systematically assess joint UN-AU missions and African-led operations.
- UN DPO and AU PSOD should develop and implement a joint protection strategy when engaged in partnered operations.
- UN DPO and AU PSOD should conduct a thorough joint POC assessment prior to any partnered deployments.
- The AU Peace and Security Council and UN Security Council should engage in regular consultations on peace support operations, including on mandates.





## Introduction

The landscape of peace operations in Africa has transformed over the past decade, including a marked increase in the number of African-led peace support operations (PSOs).<sup>1</sup> These include operations led by the African Union (AU) or regional economic communities and regional mechanisms (RECs/RMs) as well as ad hoc security initiatives (ASIs, i.e., coalitions of the willing or ad hoc coalitions). This trend has coincided with the drawdown of four large UN peacekeeping operations in Africa since 2017 (in Côte d’Ivoire, Darfur, Liberia, and Mali), while no new UN peacekeeping operation has been mandated since 2014.<sup>2</sup> Taken together, this reflects a broader shift in African approaches to peace operations due in part to the changing nature of conflict. As a result, PSOs led by the AU and African subregional organizations have taken on a larger role, whether prior to, alongside, or in place of UN-led missions.

In recognition of this shifting landscape, there have been growing calls within the UN to strengthen the organization’s partnerships with the AU and subregional organizations on PSOs, including in the UN secretary-general’s 2023 policy brief “A New Agenda for Peace” and the “Pact for the Future” adopted by member states in 2024.<sup>3</sup> These calls build on the 2017 UN-AU “Joint Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security,” which identifies principles, themes, and mechanisms to guide the broader partnership between the two organizations.<sup>4</sup> In addition, UN Security Council Resolution 2719 (2023) represents a significant advancement in the UN-AU partnership by establishing a framework for UN assessed contributions to help finance AU-led operations on a “case-by-case basis.”<sup>5</sup> Yet, despite growing acknowledgement of the value of the partnership

between the UN and the AU, questions remain about how key normative frameworks, including the protection of civilians (POC), will be upheld in the context of this partnership.

Since the early 2000s, the AU and UN have evolved distinct, albeit parallel, conceptual and operational approaches to POC. These approaches have been shaped by the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council, a growing body of policies and guidance, and experiences in the field. While there are similarities in how the two organizations conceptualize POC, the UN and AU have different operational approaches, and it is unclear how these could or should converge in the future, whether in the context of joint operations or broader partnership within peace operations settings. Further, given the important role that RECs/RMs and ASIs will likely continue to play in the future, it is critical to also examine how POC has been undertaken within their operations.

This policy paper sets out to identify areas of convergence and divergence in the UN and AU’s conceptualizations of and approaches to POC. While focusing principally on the UN-AU partnership over the past decade, it also considers the role of RECs/RMs and ASIs, including by drawing on examples of current and recent operations that are authorized, endorsed, or recognized by the AU (see Box 1). The paper finds that there is complementarity between the UN and AU’s conceptual understandings of POC. It argues that rather than duplicating operational approaches, the two organizations should identify their comparative advantages, acknowledge their respective limitations, and work toward an approach to POC that is tailored to each context. The paper also argues that by enhancing existing mechanisms and collaboration on POC through the 2017 UN-AU joint framework, both organizations can learn lessons

1 Cedric de Coning, “African and UN Peace Operations: Implications for the Future Role of Regional Organisations,” in *United Nations Peace Operations in a Changing Global Order*, Cedric De Coning and Mateja Peter, eds. (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Cedric de Coning, “Peace Enforcement in Africa: Doctrinal Distinctions between the African Union and United Nations,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 38, no. 1 (2017); Andrew E. Yaw Tchie, “African-Led Peace Support Operations in a Declining Period of New UN Peacekeeping Operations,” *Global Governance* 29, no. 2 (2023).

2 UN Peacekeeping, “Past Peace Operations,” available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/past-peacekeepingoperations>; Govinda Clayton, Han Dorussen, and Thomas Böhmelt, “United Nations Peace Initiatives 1946–2015: Introducing a New Dataset,” *International Interactions* 47, no. 1 (2021); Tchie, “African-Led Peace Support Operations in a Declining Period of New UN Peacekeeping Operations.”

3 This was also called for in the 2015 report by the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO). See: UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations on Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People*, UN Doc. A/70/95–A/2015/446, June 17, 2015; United Nations, “A New Agenda for Peace,” July 20, 2023; UN General Assembly Resolution 79/1 (September 22, 2024), UN Doc. A/RES/79/1.

4 United Nations and African Union, “United Nations–African Union Joint Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security,” April 19, 2017.

5 UN Security Council Resolution 2719 (December 21, 2023), UN Doc. S/RES/2719.

from each other and refine their own approaches to better deliver protection outcomes. The report's findings are based on a review of the academic and policy literature, as well as interviews with forty-nine UN and AU officials, member-state representatives, civil society representatives, and other experts.

The first section of the paper analyzes both organizations' conceptual understandings and operational approaches to POC, identifying their limitations and comparative advantages. It also examines the partnership between the UN and AU and assesses whether there is a need for the two organizations to move toward greater complementarity on POC. The second section explores how the AU and UN can embrace a holistic vision of protection and identifies mechanisms to enhance coordination. The final section provides concluding thoughts and recommendations for the UN Secretariat, AU Commission, UN Security Council, and AU Peace and Security Council.

Since the early 2000s, the AU and UN have evolved distinct, albeit parallel, conceptual and operational approaches to POC.

## UN and AU Understandings of and Approaches to POC

UN and AU conceptions of POC can both be traced, in part, to the failures of the international community to protect civilians in the 1990s.<sup>6</sup> For the UN, the failures of the missions in Rwanda and Bosnia illustrated a clear need for protection through proactive peacekeeping.<sup>7</sup> In response, in 1999, the UN Security Council gave the mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) the first explicit POC mandate.<sup>8</sup> For African leaders, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, coupled with the violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia and the genocide in Darfur, highlighted the need to respond to grave violations against civilians.<sup>9</sup> This was the inception point for POC in African-led PSOs as it helped to spur the evolution of the Organization of African Unity into the AU and the emergence of the concept of the African Standby Force.<sup>11</sup> This evolution signified a

### Box 1. Categories of AU peace support operations<sup>10</sup>

**AU-led PSO:** PSO that is mandated by the AU Assembly or PSC and directly commanded, controlled, and managed by the AU.

**AU-authorized PSO:** PSO that is authorized by the AU PSC, required to comply with AU PSC protocol and doctrine, and provided technical and material support by the AU but not directly commanded, controlled, and managed by the AU.

**AU-endorsed PSO:** PSO that is not mandated by the AU PSC or commanded, controlled, or managed by the AU, but the AU PSC receives periodic briefings from the mandating authority or the PSO.

**AU-recognized PSO:** PSO that is like an AU-endorsed PSO, with the AU PSC taking note of the decisions of the mandating authority when considering the conflict situation.

6 UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, UN Doc. A/55/305-S/2000/809, August 21, 2000. While there is no universal definition of POC, international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) provide the contemporary genesis for the concept. *Protection of Civilians*, Haidi Willmot et al., eds. (Oxford University Press, 2016).

7 Victoria Holt, Glyn Taylor, and Max Kelly, "Protecting Civilians in the Context of UN Peacekeeping Operations Successes, Setbacks and Remaining Challenges," United Nations, December 2009.

8 UN Security Council Resolution 1270 (October 22, 1999), UN Doc. S/RES/1270.

9 Prior to this, the Organization of African Unity's (OAU) intervention in Chad from 1977 to 1982, including the deployment of peacekeeping forces in 1981, constituted a unique OAU deployment where the state in crisis permitted substantial intervention by a regional organization. Andrew E. Yaw Tchie and Liezelle Kumalo, "Transferring Policy: The African Union's Protection of Civilians Policy in Peacekeeping Missions in Somalia and South Sudan," *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 23, no. 1 (2023).

10 African Union, "Doctrine on Peace Support Operations," 2021. This paper will utilize the term "African-led PSOs" to refer to the full range of categories listed in the table.

11 Interview 3, expert, July 2024; Interview 4, AU official, July 2024; Interview 5, expert, July 2024; Interview 8, UN official, July 2024; Interview 10, expert, July 2024; Interview 17, expert, July 2024; Interview 26, expert, July 2024.

shift from a culture of “noninterference to non-indifference.”<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, in 2004, the AU Peace and Security Council gave the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS) the first explicit POC mandate for an AU-led mission.<sup>13</sup>

However, from this common point of departure, the UN and AU have developed distinct approaches to POC, shaped primarily by their varied experiences at the operational level. This section analyzes areas of convergence and divergence between UN and AU approaches to POC and determines that differences between the two organizations lie primarily at the operational rather than the conceptual levels.<sup>14</sup> This section also examines the comparative advantages and limitations of each organization’s approach to POC.

## Current Conceptual Understandings of POC

The UN and AU each have a series of policies and guidelines that shape their conceptualization of POC (see Annex).<sup>15</sup> These conceptualizations share several similarities, in part because AU officials drew upon the UN policy and consulted with the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) and other entities when developing their own policy (see Table 1).<sup>16</sup>

Both the UN and the AU envisage POC as consisting of multiple tiers or pillars. The UN recognizes three tiers of POC: protection through dialogue and engagement, physical protection, and

the establishment of a protective environment. The AU recognizes four pillars: protection as part of the political process, physical protection, rights-based protection, and the establishment of a protective environment. Thus, there is overlap in the tiers/pillars, with the main difference being the AU’s inclusion of a pillar on “rights-based protection.” This pillar includes activities such as monitoring, reporting, and intervening in cases of violations and helping to build the capacity of national actors to protect and promote human rights—all of which are also encompassed by the UN’s tiered approach. A fourth rights-based protection tier was also part of the UN’s early development of its POC concept.<sup>17</sup> While the UN ultimately did not keep this tier because human rights are mainstreamed throughout its policy, AU member states opted to maintain it as the “primacy of human rights at all times” is a key principle of the policy.<sup>18</sup> Interviewees argued that the differences between the UN and AU’s tiers/pillars are “just semantic.”<sup>19</sup>

There are at least two other key distinctions between DPO’s POC policy and the AU’s POC policy. First, the two policies have different definitions of fundamental concepts (see Table 2), including POC mandates and civilians. The UN’s definition of POC mandates centers on actions taken to prevent, deter, or respond to “threats of physical violence against civilians.”<sup>20</sup> By contrast, the focus of the AU’s is broader, looking at “the level of protection afforded to civilians,” and it explicitly refers to physical and legal protection.<sup>21</sup>

12 The AU’s understanding of protection was also driven by the Responsibility to Protect. Ben Kioko, “The Right of Intervention under the African Union’s Constitutive Act: From Non-interference to Nonintervention,” *International Review of the Red Cross* 85, no. 852 (2003), p. 807. The African Peace and Security Architecture includes the AU PSC, the AU Commission, the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early Warning System, the African Standby Force, and the Peace Fund.

13 Human Rights Watch, “Sudan: Imperatives for Immediate Change,” January 19, 2006, Annex 1: The AMIS Mandate.

14 Interview 2, UN official, July 2024; Interview 3, expert, July 2024; Interview 4, AU official, July 2024; Interview 5, expert, July 2024; Interview 7, AU official, July 2024; Interview 9, expert, July 2024; Interview 16, expert, July 2024; Interview 17, expert, July 2024; Interview 27, AU official, July 2024; Interview 33, UN officials, August 2024; Interview 39, UN official, August 2024.

15 The analysis in this section is based on the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) policy on the protection of civilians (2023) and the AU’s policy on protection of civilians in PSOs (2023). Other UN entities have their own definitions of protection and policies that may have broader definitions.

16 Interview 18, UN officials, July 2024; Interview 36, expert, August 2024; Interview 39, UN official, August 2024; Interview 43, AU official, September 2024; external feedback provided February 2025.

17 Kseniya Oksamytna and Nina Wilén, “Adoption, Adaptation or Chance? Inter-organisational Diffusion of the Protection of Civilians Norm from the UN to the African Union,” *Third World Quarterly* 43, no. 10 (2022).

18 Ibid.; African Union, “African Union Policy on Protection of Civilians in Peace Support Operations,” April 19, 2023, para. 16(a).

19 Interview 7, AU official, July 2024; Interview 16, expert, July 2024; Interview 17, expert, July 2024; Interview 18, UN officials, July 2024.

20 UN DPO, “The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping,” May 1, 2023, para. 13.

21 The AU POC policy defines protection of civilians as a “range of activities undertaken to improve the security of the population and people at risk and to ensure the full respect for the rights of groups and the individual recognised under regional instruments, including the African Charter of Human and Peoples’ Rights, the AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons, and the Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, and international law, including international humanitarian law, international human rights law and refugee law.”

Table 1. Key convergences and divergences between the POC policies for UN peacekeeping operations and AU peace support operations

Element	UN Peacekeeping Operations	AU Peace Support Operations
Host state bears primary responsibility for POC	Yes, but mission may act to protect civilians when the host state is “unable or unwilling to do so” and may act independently of the host state	Yes, but mission may act to protect civilians when the host state is “unable to do so”
Grounded in international law (international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and international refugee law)	Yes	Yes
“Comprehensive” approach to POC identifying roles and responsibilities for different mission components	Yes	Yes
Do no harm as a guiding principle	Yes	Yes
Mitigation of harm to civilians during offensive operations	Yes	Yes
Mission-specific protection strategies	Yes	Yes
Guidance on how and when force can be used	Yes	Yes
Proactive protection	Yes, also describes “active duty to protect”	Yes
Gender POC considerations	Yes, framed as “gender-responsive POC” <sup>22</sup>	Yes, framed as “gender mainstreaming in POC”
Tiered/pillared approach to protection	Yes, through three tiers: protection through dialogue and engagement, physical protection, and the establishment of a protective environment	Yes, through four pillars: protection as part of the political process, protection from physical violence, rights-based protection, and the establishment of a protective environment
Four-phased approach to POC encompassing prevention, pre-emption, response, and consolidation	Yes, discusses these phases as part of POC across all tiers	Yes, discusses these phases within pillar two and applies these phases to all four pillars

<sup>22</sup> The UN DPO policy also has more detail on gender considerations than the AU policy.

The reference to legal protection is likely included because, in addition to its POC policy, the AU also has a Compliance and Accountability Framework for PSOs. This framework outlines the AU’s compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL), international human rights law (IHRL), POC, and AU standards of conduct and discipline, all of which the AU views as components of its protection efforts.<sup>23</sup> The AU also views the prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) as part of its broader efforts on POC and civilian harm mitigation (CHM). For the UN, SEA is covered under conduct and discipline.

The organizations also have different definitions of

civilians. In the DPO policy, like in IHL, civilians are defined negatively as everyone who is not a combatant, whereas in the AU policy, civilians are defined positively with a list of who qualifies to be considered as such. This difference has implications for the organizations’ operational postures on POC. For the UN, the burden of proof is to show that someone is not a civilian, whereas for the AU, the burden of proof is to show that they are, which is important when it comes to determining who may be considered a legitimate target. Conversely, the UN is more concerned with identifying individuals or groups to protect through proactive operations. As such, the DPO policy does not address who can be targeted.

Table 2. Key definitions in the POC policies for UN peacekeeping and AU-led PSOs<sup>24</sup>

Term	UN Peacekeeping Operations	AU Peace Support Operations
<b>POC mandate</b>	“Without prejudice to the primary responsibility of the host state, integrated and coordinated activities by all civilian and uniformed mission components to prevent, deter or respond to threats of physical violence against civilians within the mission’s capabilities and areas of deployment through the use of all necessary means, up to and including deadly force.”	“The sum of all aspects of protection concerns reflected in a PSO mandate, including physical, legal, and other relevant protection activities aimed at enhancing the level of protection afforded to civilians in the area of operations.”
<b>Civilian</b>	“For the purposes of this policy and the POC mandate in peacekeeping, everyone is to be considered a civilian, except persons falling in one of the following categories: members of the armed forces; members of an organized armed group with continuous combat function; and civilians directly participating in hostilities, for such time as they do so. In case of doubt whether a person is a civilian, that person shall be considered a civilian.”	“Comprises any individual who does not or no longer participates in hostilities, namely: civilians who are not taking direct part in hostilities; former fighters who have surrendered their arms and uniforms; fighters who have become hors de combat due to sickness, wounds, detention or any other cause. For the purpose of this policy and without prejudice to the definition of civilian under IHL, any person who is not or no longer directly participating in hostilities or in other acts of organized violence shall be considered a civilian, unless he or she is a member of armed forces or groups. In case of doubt whether a person is a civilian, that person shall be considered a civilian and shall be protected.”

<sup>23</sup> On file with author.

<sup>24</sup> UN DPO, “The Protection of Civilians,” para. 13; AU, “African Union Policy on Protection of Civilians,” p. 5.

This leads to differences in how both organizations approach the question of affiliation with armed groups and civilians who are directly participating in hostilities. The UN utilizes the language of IHL, stating that members of an organized armed group “with continuous combat function” and civilians “directly participating in hostilities, for such time as they do” are combatants. While the AU’s definition is also grounded in IHL, the AU drops two critical references included in the UN definition—“continuous combat function” and “for such time as they do”—both of which are key criteria for assessing who qualifies as a civilian under international law.<sup>25</sup> The AU also adds “organized violence,” which has no definition under international law. While these differences might seem negligible, they have implications for how both organizations understand who qualifies as a civilian.

Second, while both policies refer to the host state bearing the primary responsibility to protect civilians and establish that missions will support the host state in these efforts, they differ on when missions can intervene. The AU POC policy states that PSOs are obligated to protect civilians when the host state is “unable to do so” but does not refer to how a PSO can respond if the host state itself poses a threat to civilians.<sup>26</sup> The AU avoided explicitly mentioning a state’s potential unwillingness to protect civilians, determining that this might be counterproductive to the overall objective. Nonetheless, the lack of such an explicit reference does not preclude action at the operational level when necessary.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, the DPO policy explicitly states that the mission may “act independently to protect civilians when the host state is deemed unable or unwilling to do so, or where the

While there are some conceptual differences between how the UN and AU understand POC, the primary differences lie in implementation at the operational level.

government forces themselves pose a threat to civilians.”<sup>28</sup> In practice, however, responding to threats posed by host-state authorities has proven challenging.<sup>29</sup> The DPO policy acknowledges these challenges, noting that responding to threats posed by the host state may impact the host state’s consent for the presence of peacekeepers as well as peacekeepers’ safety.<sup>30</sup>

The UN POC policy applies to all UN peacekeeping operations with a mandate to protect civilians.<sup>31</sup> The AU POC policy applies to all AU-led PSOs and serves as a guide to PSOs conducted by RECs/RMs and ASIs, whether authorized, endorsed, or recognized by the AU.<sup>32</sup> For example, the AU POC policy applies to the AU Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM, which is AU-led).<sup>33</sup> For other missions it has authorized, endorsed, or recognized, the AU supports the REC/RM or ASI on POC and implementation of the Compliance and Accountability Framework. In some cases, including for the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF, which is AU-authorized) against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin, there is a memorandum of understanding on how the mission and AU will work together.

Some experts argue that the AU POC policy should automatically apply to all REC/RM-led PSOs. This would include, for example, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) and the SADC Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (SAMIDRC). The RECs/RMs were involved in the development, review, and validation of the AU POC policy. In addition, since it was endorsed by

25 International Committee of the Red Cross, “ICRC Interpretive Guidance on the Notion of Direct Participation in Hostilities under International Humanitarian Law,” May 2009.

26 AU, “African Union Policy on Protection of Civilians,” para. 34.

27 External feedback received March 7, 2025.

28 UN DPO, “The Protection of Civilians,” para. 22.

29 See, for example: Patryk I. Labuda, “With or Against the State? Reconciling the Protection of Civilians and Host-State Support in UN Peacekeeping,” International Peace Institute, May 2020.

30 UN DPO, “The Protection of Civilians,” para. 56.

31 Ibid. The UN Security Council has mandated a total of sixteen peacekeeping missions to protect civilians. See: UN Peacekeeping, “Protection of Civilians Mandate,” available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/protection-of-civilians-mandate>.

32 External feedback received March 7, 2025.

33 AUSSOM is authorized but will not be fully operational until July 1, 2025. Written feedback received February 28, 2025.

the Assembly of Heads of State and Government—the highest policy and decision-making organ of the AU—in principle, it automatically applies to RECs/RMs.<sup>34</sup> On paper, however, the policy states that RECs/RMs “shall ensure that all PSO mandates address POC issues,” but it does not explicitly state that they are obligated to adhere to the provisions.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, RECs/RMs tend to employ the AU POC policy because they are embedded within the African Standby Force and their troop- and police-contributing countries (T/PCCs) receive the standardized AU training for PSOs. In addition, the AU compliance team supports the RECs/RMs to develop mission-level instruments that align with the AU POC policy. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate how POC is conceptualized within each of the RECs/RMs and ASIs, the next section draws on a few examples to illustrate the variation in the extent to which the RECs/RMs and ASIs have implemented the AU POC policy.<sup>36</sup>

Whereas UN peacekeepers use force in self-defense and in defense of the mandate, African-led PSOs are more militarized and are often mandated to undertake offensive operations.

## Current Operational Approaches to POC

While there are some conceptual differences between how the UN and AU understand POC, the primary differences lie in implementation at the operational level. This is because African-led PSOs and UN peacekeeping operations are “different beasts.”<sup>37</sup> UN peacekeeping operations are typically deployed after the signing of a peace agreement and, in principle, are there to support the government and all parties in maintaining peace. Conversely, many current and recent African-led operations are what the UN would label peace enforcement missions and are deployed to fight alongside government forces to neutralize an armed group.

However, UN peacekeeping operations and African-led PSOs do not always fit neatly within these models. The Force Intervention Brigade within the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) was mandated to carry out offensive operations and disarm armed groups on the side of the state.<sup>38</sup> More broadly, MONUSCO and some other UN missions with stabilization mandates such as the missions in Mali (MINUSMA) and the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) have mandates that place them largely on the side of the government. For its part, the AU deployed missions to Burundi (AMIB, 2003–2004) and Sudan (AMIS I, 2004–2005 and AMIS II, 2005–2007) to monitor cease-fires. More recently, the AU also deployed a mission to curb the spread of Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (2019) and to monitor human rights and the disarmament of armed groups in Burundi (2015–2021). Since then, however, all AU-led PSOs, as well as REC/RM-led operations and ASIs, have primarily been peace enforcement missions, though they have retained their multidimensional structures with small civilian and police components. As such, this paper focuses on these more recent cases of peace enforcement missions.

The operational distinctions between UN peacekeeping operations and African-led PSOs have several implications. First, UN peacekeeping operations are intended to operate in an impartial manner, even if at times they have provided support to government forces, as in the DRC. By contrast, African-led PSOs have more often been considered active parties to the conflict based on their support to government efforts to degrade the capabilities of armed groups and create an enabling environment

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> AU, “African Union Policy on Protection of Civilians,” para. 50. The full text reads: “RECs/RMs shall ensure that all PSO mandates address PoC issues. RECs/RMs should furthermore facilitate the inclusion of a Compliance Issues Section in the situation reports from their PSOs. RECs/RMs that deploy PSO shall task their Heads of Missions to develop mission-wide strategies for PoC. Mission-wide strategies shall specify PoC activities and should integrate the PSO’s military, police, and civilian efforts. RECs/RMs shall disseminate these guidelines, together with other compliance documents, to Member States and T/PCCs. In the cases of violations of the PoC mandate and standards by PSO personnel, the leadership of RECs/RMs should encourage T/PCCs to rapidly investigate personnel accused of misconduct and hold them accountable.”

<sup>36</sup> Tchic and Kumalo, “Transferring Policy.”

<sup>37</sup> Interview 30, UN official, July 2024.

<sup>38</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2098 (March 28, 2013), UN Doc. S/RES/2098.

for political processes.<sup>39</sup> For example, the AU-led missions in Somalia (AMISOM, ATMIS, and now AUSSOM) have all been mandated to support the Somali government in countering al-Shabaab.<sup>40</sup> In addition, the AU has authorized three ASIs, including the G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S), MNJTF in the Lake Chad Basin, and the AU Regional Coordination Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army (RCI-LRA) to conduct offensive operations against terrorist groups.<sup>41</sup> Several REC-led missions, such as SAMIM and SAMIDRC, have also been given mandates to combat terrorist groups.<sup>42</sup> This speaks to the second key distinction between UN peacekeeping operations and African-led PSOs: whereas UN peacekeepers use force in self-defense and in defense of the mandate, African-led PSOs are more militarized and are often mandated to undertake offensive operations.<sup>43</sup>

Third, UN peacekeeping operations with POC mandates are generally multidimensional missions with military, police, and civilian components. The AU doctrine on PSOs includes a broad range of mission types, including missions with multidimensional structures.<sup>44</sup> However, interviewees frequently contrasted the multidimensional nature

The AU has focused on peace enforcement as a way to provide security to enable other actors, including the UN, to undertake longer-term programming.

of UN missions with African-led operations, which they saw as prioritizing the military component, with limited police and civilian personnel.<sup>45</sup> For example, in ATMIS, which was a multidimensional mission, just 0.34 percent of personnel were civilians in 2022.<sup>46</sup> As explored in the next section, the limited civilian capacity of AU operations impacts their approach to POC, including their ability to engage communities.

These three distinctions, along with differences in available resources (discussed below), lead to significant differences in how UN and African-led operations aim to achieve protection outcomes for civilians. The UN views POC in peacekeeping as a whole-of-mission objective, with military, police, and civilian components prioritizing POC and proactively protecting civilians.<sup>47</sup> The AU, on the other hand, has come to view itself as contributing to the protection of civilians primarily by neutralizing armed groups and eliminating the threat they pose.<sup>48</sup> In effect, the AU has focused on peace enforcement as a way to provide security to enable other actors, including the UN, to undertake longer-term programming.<sup>49</sup> This focus is also reflected in the AU PSO doctrine, which notes that operations contribute “to stability

39 Interview 12, experts, July 2024. There is some literature showing the limitations of the principle of impartiality in practice in UN stabilization missions. See, for example: Emily Paddon Rhoads, “Taking Sides in Peacekeeping: Impartiality and the Future of the United Nations,” 2016; Allard Duursma, Sara Lindberg Bromley, and Aditi Gorur, “The Impact of Host-State Consent on the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping,” *Civil Wars* 26, no. 1 (2023).

40 UN Security Council Resolution 2568 (March 12, 2021), UN Doc. S/RES/2568, para. 12(a); UN Security Council Resolution 2767 (December 27, 2024), UN Doc. S/RES/2767, para. 16(a)(g).

41 G5 Sahel Secretariat Resolution No. 00-01/2017, February 6, 2017; Multinational Joint Task Force, “MNJTF Mandate,” available at <https://mnjtfmm.org/mandates/>; AU Doc. PSC/PR/COMM.(CCXCIX), November 22, 2011, para. 5.

42 SADC, “SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) in Brief,” available at [https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2021-11/SAMIM\\_Fact\\_sheet.pdf](https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2021-11/SAMIM_Fact_sheet.pdf); SADC, “Executive Secretary Visits the SADC Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC),” January 24, 2024, available at <https://www.sadc.int/node/5252>.

43 Interview 9, expert, July 2024; Interview 39, UN official, August 2024; Interview 15, expert, July 2024.

44 The African Standby Force, which is part of the African Peace and Security Architecture and from which AU PSOs have emerged, is conceived to deploy under six conflict scenarios and to encompass multidimensional aspects. The six scenarios are: (1) AU/regional military advice to a political mission, (2) an AU/regional observer mission co-deployed with a UN mission, (3) a standalone AU/regional observer mission, (4) an AU/regional peacekeeping force for Chapter VI and preventive deployment missions, (5) an AU peacekeeping force for a complex multidimensional peacekeeping mission in a conflict with low-level spoilers, and (6) an AU intervention in certain situations (e.g., in situations of genocide where the international community does not act promptly). See: African Union, “Policy Framework for the Establishment of the African Standby Force and the Military Staff Committee,” May 15–16, 2003, p. 3; African Union, “Policy Framework for the Civilian Dimension of the African Standby Force,” August 29–September 1, 2006; Amani Africa, “The African Union Peace and Security Council Handbook 2021: Guide on the Council’s Procedure, Practice and Traditions,” 2021, p. 93.

45 Interview 5, expert, July 2024; Interview 15, expert, July 2024; Interview 17, expert, July 2024; Interview 18, UN officials, July 2024; Interview 22, UN official, July 2024; Interview 23, expert, July 2024; Interview 33, UN officials, August 2024; Interview 34, civil society representatives, August 2024; Interview 38, member-state official, August 2024; Interview 40, civil society representative, August 2024.

46 In March 2022, the UN Security Council authorized ATMIS to have 70 civilian staff and to deploy 19,626 uniformed personnel, including 1,040 police. Thus, out of the total personnel for the mission, civilians comprised 0.34 percent. This does not include any civilian support that UNSOS might have provided to ATMIS.

47 See, for example: Allard Duursma et al., “UN Peacekeeping at 75: Achievements, Challenges, and Prospects,” *International Peacekeeping* 30, no. 4 (2023); Charles T. Hunt, “‘To Serve and Protect’: The Changing Roles of Police in the Protection of Civilians in UN Peace Operations,” *Civil Wars* 26, no. 1 (2024).

48 Interview 1, expert, July 2024; Interview 3, expert, July 2024; Interview 18, UN officials, July 2024; Interview 30, UN official, July 2024.

49 Interview 13, AU official, July 2024.



and in creating the conditions and enabling environment for political process and sustainable peace.”<sup>50</sup> The underlying assumption is that military operations in the short term can support better protection outcomes in the long term (discussed more below).

Another important historical distinction between African-led PSOs and UN peacekeeping operations is whether they are focused on protecting civilians from external actors or mitigating harm to civilians resulting from the actions of their own forces, though this focus is evolving. Because UN peacekeepers are deployed, in principle, to keep the peace, their primary focus has been on protecting civilians from external actors—both state and non-state armed groups. Nevertheless, as UN peacekeeping has evolved, it has more recently focused on civilian harm mitigation (CHM).<sup>51</sup> While CHM is still a relatively nascent focus for UN peacekeeping, MONUSCO and MINUSCA have mandates that include language on CHM, as did MINUSMA before it withdrew.<sup>52</sup>

Conversely, because most recent and current African-led PSOs have been mandated to undertake offensive operations in highly kinetic environments, they have focused their protection efforts on mitigating harm to civilians resulting from the actions of their own forces and those of the state during offensive operations (see Box 2). Nonetheless, African-led PSOs have evolved to also consider threats to civilians from external actors such as non-state armed groups. For example, one interviewee noted that in Somalia, the AU has sought to anticipate the actions of armed groups to

put measures in place to protect civilians in potential hot spots.<sup>53</sup> AMISOM integrated POC into its concept of operations (CONOPS) and rules of engagement (ROE) in 2012 and introduced a mission-wide POC strategy in 2013. In practice, however, AMISOM faced numerous challenges, such as a lack of adequate training and expertise to effectively undertake POC.<sup>54</sup> As another example, the MNJTF adopted a three-year mission-wide POC strategy in 2021 that is currently being reviewed.<sup>55</sup> On several occasions, the mission has successfully provided protection and “safe corridors” for humanitarian actors to deliver assistance.<sup>56</sup> However, because of the evolving strategies of armed groups, it has been challenging for the mission to continue to hold and protect these areas for civilians.<sup>57</sup>

## Comparative Advantages and Limitations

Most interviewees agreed that it is neither feasible nor advisable for the UN’s approach to POC to be replicated by or transposed onto the AU (or vice versa) as both organizations have comparative advantages that should be leveraged rather than erased. At the same time, given the multitude of actors involved in peace operations settings, it is critical that these actors have a complementary conceptual understanding of POC and a shared commitment to protecting civilians, regardless of which organization deploys and leads a mission. Beyond the UN and AU, this network of actors may also include states deploying forces bilaterally, subregional organizations, and the host state itself.

50 African Union, “Draft Guidelines for the Protection of Civilians in African Union Peace Support Operations,” available at <http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/draft-au-poc-guidelines-english.pdf>. See also the same reference in the AU Policy on POC.

51 Kingdom of the Netherlands, DPO, PAX, and CIVIC, “Advancing Civilian Harm Mitigation in UN Peacekeeping,” closed-door roundtable, May 24, 2023, available at <https://paxforpeace.nl/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/09/2309-UN-PoC-Week-CHM-Event-Summary-Report.pdf>.

52 UN Security Council Resolution 2709 (November 15, 2023), UN Doc. S/RES/2709, para. 36(a)(iii); UN Security Council Resolution 2717 (December 19, 2023), UN Doc. S/RES/2717, para. 34(i)(a); UN Security Council Resolution 2640 (June 29, 2022), UN Doc. S/RES/2640, para. 26(c)(ii). While the mandates for the three missions include explicit CHM language, the absence of such language in other mission mandates does not imply that they should refrain from taking measures to mitigate harm. It could be argued that these measures are covered under the broader “do no harm” principle, which serves as a guiding framework for both the AU and the UN policies. External feedback received February 28, 2025.

53 Interview 17, expert, July 2024.

54 See, for example: Harley Henigson, “Inadequate Strategies to Protect Somalis Undermine Efforts to Defeat al-Shabaab,” *IPI Global Observatory*, May 9, 2018; Jide Martyns Okeke and Paul D. Williams, eds., *Protecting Civilians in African Union Peace Support Operations: Key Cases and Lessons Learned* (Durban, South Africa: ACCORD, 2017).

55 Interview 7, AU official, July 2024.

56 Freedom Chukwudi Onuoha, Andrew E. Yaw Tchie, and Mariana Llorens Zabala, “A Quest to Win the Hearts and Minds: Assessing the Effectiveness of the Multinational Joint Task Force,” *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI)*, January 2023, p. 15.

57 *Ibid.*

### Box 2. Examples of civilian harm mitigation in AU-led and AU-authorized PSOs

**AU-led missions—Somalia:** AMISOM (2007–2022), ATMIS (2022–2024), and AUSSOM (2025–present) have all been mandated to counter al-Shabaab. In these missions, the AU protection efforts have focused on ensuring that operations are conducted in compliance with IHL and IHRL while utilizing and institutionalizing tools designed for mitigating civilian harm during offensive operations.<sup>58</sup> This began with AMISOM, which developed an indirect fire policy in 2010 and established the civilian casualties tracking, analysis, and response (CCTARC) in 2012.<sup>59</sup> In 2019, AMISOM also began operationalizing a procedure to issue amends in cases where civilians had been harmed.<sup>60</sup> Despite these positive steps, AMISOM/ATMIS have faced several challenges with CHM. For example, CCTARC has encountered operational and political difficulties, while the process for issuing amends has not been fully realized.<sup>61</sup>

**AU-authorized ASI—Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin:** The MNJTF (2015–present) is coordinated by the Lake Chad Basin Commission and contributes to the Regional Stabilization Strategy. The operation was deployed to counter Boko Haram and comprises troops from the Lake Chad Basin countries Cameroon, Chad, Niger,<sup>62</sup> and Nigeria (which primarily operates within its own borders), as well as a smaller contingent from Benin.<sup>63</sup> The mission recognized that there was a need to better engage with communities during its operations.<sup>64</sup> This led to the embedding of an AU cell within the mission (the civil-military cooperation cell, or CIMIC) to monitor operations, ensure compliance with IHL and IHRL, and train troops in line with the AU Compliance and Accountability Framework.<sup>65</sup>

**AU-authorized ASI—The G5 Sahel Joint Task Force:** The FC-G5S (2017–2023) was coordinated by the Secretariat of the Group of Five for the Sahel to combat terrorism. It comprised troops from the G5 Sahel countries Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. In collaboration with the G5 Sahel countries, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) helped to design a compliance framework “tailored to the operational environment” of the mission aimed at preventing civilian harm during offensive military operations.<sup>66</sup> The compliance framework had seven pillars: (1) screening and selection, (2) training, (3) adoption and dissemination of rules and regulations, (4) integration of human rights and POC requirements into planning and conduct of operations, (5) after-action reviews, (6) monitoring and reporting on military operations, and (7) mechanisms and procedures to ensure accountability for human rights violations.<sup>67</sup> The mission also established a civilian casualties identification, tracking and analysis cell in 2021.<sup>68</sup>

58 Interview 7, AU official, July 2024; Interview 30, UN official, July 2024; Interview 44, AU official, September 2024.

59 See: AMISOM, “Civilian Casualty Tracking, Analysis, and Response Cell (CCTARC),” available at <https://amisom-au.org/cctarc/>; IHL in Action, “Applying AMISOM’s Indirect Fire Policy in Somalia: 2010–2011,” International Committee of the Red Cross.

60 Natasja Rupesinghe, “The Civilian Casualty Tracking Analysis and Response Cell in the African Union Mission in Somalia: An Emerging Best Practice for AU Peace Support Operations?” NUPI, March 2019; Josh Jorgensen, “Strengthening Protection of Civilians by AU Peace Support Operations for a New Era of Missions,” CIVIC, November 2024, p. 5.

61 Ibid.

62 In February 2024, Niger announced its withdrawal from the MNJTF. See: Joshua Olusegun Bolarinwa, “Implications of Niger’s Withdrawal from the Multinational Joint Task Force,” ACCORD, February 29, 2024.

63 See: Multinational Joint Task Force, “Multinational Joint Task Force,” available at <https://mnjtfmm.org/>.

64 Chika Charles Aniekwe and Katharine Brooks, “Multinational Joint Task Force: Lessons for Comprehensive Regional Approaches to Cross-Border Conflict in Africa,” *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 26, no. 4 (2024); Onuoha, Tchie, and Zabala, “A Quest to Win the Hearts and Minds.”

65 AU Doc. PSC/PR/RPT.1126, December 12, 2022.

66 OHCHR, “Project Supporting the G5 Sahel Joint Force with Implementation of the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Compliance Framework,” available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/africa-region/project-supporting-g5-sahel-joint-force-implementation-human-rights-and-international-humanitarian>.

67 Ibid.

68 See: AMISOM, “AMISOM Set to Begin the Process of Making Amends for Civilian Harms in Somalia,” August 10, 2016; Nadia Adam and Michaël Matongbada, “Putting the Protection of Civilians at the Heart of Military Interventions: Lessons Learnt from the G5 Sahel Joint Force,” CIVIC, May 2024.

The need for complementary approaches to POC is especially important given that the UN’s twenty-five years of experience with POC largely stems from African contexts and missions with a high share of African T/PCCs.

There is an even greater need for complementarity on POC in partnered settings where the UN and AU have deployed jointly or sequentially. For example, the UN-AU Mission in Darfur’s (UNAMID) record of “imperfect protection” illustrated both the challenges of coordinating protection efforts and the importance of establishing shared political commitments to POC and complementary operational responsibilities.<sup>69</sup> Moving forward, such complementarity will be important in any joint operation undertaken by the UN and AU.<sup>70</sup> In practice, this could involve DPO and the AU Peace Support Operations Division (PSOD) working together to ensure that POC is a critical aspect of strategic or technical assessments used to inform the development and review of any mandate, CONOPS, or ROE for a mission.

When multiple actors are operating in the same context, there is also a greater need for clarity on their respective roles, responsibilities, mandates, and strategies for POC. This is evident in eastern DRC, where MONUSCO, SAMIDRC, and the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) have all deployed with different interpretations of their POC obligations and approaches to protection.<sup>71</sup> This case has illustrated the need to agree on and uphold standards on POC whenever multiple actors operating in the same context have different conceptions of their protection responsibilities,

interpretations of their obligations under IHL, and political interests. Equally, it is important to be realistic and manage expectations about POC given the different actors’ capabilities, mandates, and motivations.<sup>72</sup>

While perspectives varied on how the AU and UN could strengthen their partnership on POC moving forward, there was consensus that they can learn lessons from each other. Respondents noted that on the AU side, there was a willingness to embrace, learn from, and adapt UN guidelines and policies to fit AU contexts. Conversely, many UN personnel interviewed did not demonstrate a clear understanding of the AU’s approach to POC, other than those individuals who had previously worked for or closely alongside the AU. Therefore, unpacking the respective comparative advantages and limitations of the AU and UN on POC can help ensure complementarity moving forward (see Table 3).

Most interviewees agreed that it is neither feasible nor advisable for the UN’s approach to POC to be replicated by or transposed onto the AU (or vice versa).

The comparative advantages and limitations of UN peacekeeping operations and African-led PSOs on POC can be broadly categorized into five areas. The first is the extent to which POC has become institutionalized within each organization. The UN’s approach to POC has developed over the past twenty-five years through detailed policies, guidance, and training, as well as performance and accountability tools. The UN created a draft operational concept on POC in 2010, issued its first POC policy in 2015 (revised in 2019 and 2023), and developed guidelines for police and military components, among other materials (see Annex). In terms of training, the UN has developed pre-

69 Ralph Mamiya and Wibke Hansen, “Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations–African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID),” NUPI, 2020.

70 UN Security Council Resolution 2719 emphasizes that, should AU PSOs receive assessed contributions, they must “ensure that the protection of civilians is prioritized” in the planning, CONOPS, ROE, policy, and guidance documents. See: UN Doc. S/RES/2719, para. 12. The joint task force on Resolution 2719, co-led by DPO and AU PSOD, has four workstreams for implementation: (1) joint planning, decision making, and reporting; (2) mission support; (3) financing and budgeting; and (4) human rights compliance and protection of civilians (which also includes conduct and discipline as well as gender mainstreaming). See: DPO and AU PSOD, “Joint AU–UN Roadmap.”

71 On POC, MONUSCO is tasked with the “protection of civilians under threat of physical violence by taking all necessary measures to ensure effective, timely, dynamic and integrated protection.” See UN Security Council Resolution 2765 (December 20, 2024), UN Doc. S/RES/2765, para. 36(i). The East African Community Regional Force was mandated to “protect civilians and support the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to the areas vacated by armed groups.” See: <https://www.eac.int/communique/2813-communic%C3%A9-of-the-21st-extraordinary-summit-of-the-east-african-community-heads-of-state>. SAMIDRC is mandated to “protect civilians and their properties under imminent threats or attacks.” See: SADC, “Executive Secretary Visits the SADC Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (SAMIDRC).” See also: Kizito Sabala, “The Role, Progress and Challenges of the EAC Regional Force in the Eastern DRC,” ACCORD, March 30, 2023; Nelleke van de Walle, “East Africa’s DR Congo Force: The Case for Caution,” International Crisis Group, August 25, 2022; Sara Petrovski, Abigail Gérard Baldé, and Lauren Spink, “Civilian Perspectives on Regional Security Efforts to Address Violence in the DRC,” CIVIC, July 2024.

72 Annie Shiel, “The Sum of All Parts, Reducing Civilian Harm in Multinational Coalition Operations,” CIVIC, January 2019.

Table 3. Comparative advantages and limitations on POC

Area	UN Peacekeeping Operations	African-Led Peace Support Operations
<b>Comparative Advantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutionalized POC policies, guidance, trainings, and performance tools over the past twenty-five years</li> <li>• Can undertake a stronger mix of military-, police-, and civilian-led protection activities because of their multidimensional nature</li> <li>• Can take a more coordinated approach due to strong presence at both local and national levels</li> <li>• Have sustainable and flexible financing through assessed contributions</li> <li>• Have more equipment and resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can deploy rapidly</li> <li>• Have flexibility on which actors the AU can authorize to deploy (RECs/RMs and ASIs)</li> <li>• Can more readily use force to respond to outbreaks of violence and to contain aggressors</li> <li>• Can draw on in-country liaison offices and observer missions to connect military operations to political strategies</li> </ul>
<b>Comparative Limitations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May be slow to authorize, deploy, and generate needed capabilities</li> <li>• Once deployed, can be slow to react in a timely manner to outbreaks of violence</li> <li>• Have troop-contributing countries (TCCs) that tend to be more risk-averse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a primarily militarized approach to protection</li> <li>• Struggle to sustain efforts over an extended period</li> <li>• Rely on unsustainable and ad hoc financing from external sources and a lack of adequate resources</li> <li>• Rely on institutionalized mechanisms for training and accountability that are still in development</li> </ul>

deployment and in-mission trainings on POC for civilian, military, and police personnel and comprehensive POC reinforcement training packages for troops and police.<sup>73</sup>

In terms of accountability and performance frameworks, the UN developed the Integrated Peacekeeping Performance and Accountability Framework (IPPAF) in 2020 and has institutionalized the Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS), designed to help missions assess their performance and more effectively implement mandates.<sup>74</sup> The UN also uses special investigations to examine “grave incidents in UN peacekeeping operations that result in a significant number of casualties, including due to a potential failure to protect civilians or UN personnel, or which involve alleged significant

performance failings, or potentially have significant implications for mandate implementation.”<sup>75</sup> There is also a suite of mechanisms used to evaluate POC mandates and implementation, including evaluations by the Office for Peacekeeping Strategic Partnerships (OPSP) and the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). At the same time, while the UN has taken strides toward instituting performance tools, it lacks a cohesive accountability structure for POC.<sup>76</sup>

While the AU has made progress over the past decade, it is still in the process of institutionalizing POC. The AU PSC–endorsed draft guidelines on POC in 2010 outline its four-tier approach. Experiences and lessons from the implementation of these guidelines informed the AU POC policy that was approved in 2023 alongside the AU

73 UN Peacekeeping Resource Hub, “Reinforcement Training Packages—Comprehensive Protection of Civilians for Military Units,” available at <https://peacekeepingresourcehub.un.org/en/training/rtp/cpoc-military>.

74 UN Peacekeeping, “The Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System,” available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/cpas>; Security Council Report, “Briefing on UN Peacekeeping Operations,” September 7, 2023.

75 See: Namie Di Razza, “The Accountability System for the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping,” International Peace Institute, December 2020.

76 Ibid.

Compliance and Accountability Framework. This framework addresses the AU’s legal and policy instruments, approaches, mechanisms, and roles and responsibilities related to compliance and accountability to POC, IHL, IHRL, and AU standards of conduct and discipline. The AU has worked to implement the framework, including by building capacity on compliance and accountability within specific missions (such as in ATMIS, MNJTF, and SAMIM).<sup>77</sup> The AU also developed harmonized training standards on POC in 2018.<sup>78</sup>

The second area is how UN and AU operations respond to outbreaks of violence. Previous studies have found that the presence of UN peacekeepers can be effective in deterring violence, particularly by non-state armed groups, but they are less effective in stopping violence once it has broken out.<sup>79</sup> This is in part because of risk aversion among some TCCs.<sup>80</sup> By contrast, African-led PSOs have rapid deployment capabilities and greater flexibility with which actors are mandated to deploy and take offensive action. In addition, they can more readily use force to respond to outbreaks of violence and contain aggressors.<sup>81</sup> As a result, in some cases, these operations have been effective in providing short-term physical protection, though they have also faced myriad challenges. SAMIM, an AU-endorsed operation deployed in July 2021 to combat terrorist groups in the Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique, is a useful example.<sup>82</sup> Despite significant challenges, SAMIM “dealt the insurgency a hard blow, leading to a significant decline in their numbers, resulting in a significant fall in reported fatalities, and the proportion of

civilians amongst fatalities.”<sup>83</sup> In addition, by August 2023, 570,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) were able to return.<sup>84</sup> As another example, one study found that MNJTF operations led to an “initial decline” in Boko Haram attacks between 2016 and 2019, lower levels of fatalities between 2019 and 2021, and increases in the number of terrorists surrendering in the region. They also helped to create a “conducive environment” for refugees and IDPs to return.<sup>85</sup>

However, these operations are not without their limitations. They can pose direct and indirect risks to civilians when civilian harm mitigation measures are not put in place. They can also be difficult to sustain over an extended period, especially as armed groups’ tactics and strategies evolve. Finally, these types of missions are designed to be short-term solutions aimed at creating stability and “space” for other actors to engage and address underlying causes of violence.<sup>86</sup> If that does not happen, any short-term gains can be lost. In this respect, SAMIM provides a cautionary tale for the MNJTF and similar current and future missions. Due to the absence of political solutions to counter the drivers of insecurity, among other factors, SAMIM’s withdrawal, which officially began in April 2024 and was completed in July 2024, allowed “the insurgency to regain momentum” and reclaim territory, further threatening the lives of civilians.<sup>87</sup>

The third area is mission composition, in particular the capacity of civilian and police components. As previously discussed, the UN has deployed multi-

77 African Union, *Meeting of the Operational Technical Committee (OTC) of the AU-EU-UN Partnership Project for the Enhancement of the Compliance and Accountability Framework for African Union Peace Support Operations*, June 20, 2023.

78 Rumbidzaisho Matambo, “Pilot Training on the Reviewed Protection of Civilians Training Package for African Union Peace Support Operations,” ACCORD, September 6, 2024.

79 UN General Assembly, *Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services: Evaluation of the Implementation and Results of Protection of Civilians Mandates in UN Peacekeeping Operations*, UN Doc. A/68/787, March 7, 2014; Hanna Fjelde, Lisa Hultman, and Desirée Nilsson, “Protection Through Presence: UN Peacekeeping and the Costs of Targeting Civilians,” *International Organization* 73, no. 1 (2019). Other studies have illustrated mixed results on deterrence. See, for example: Andrea Ruggeri, Han Dorussen, and Theodora-Ismene Gizelis, “Winning the Peace Locally: UN Peacekeeping and Local Conflict,” *International Organization* 71, no. 1 (2017); Ralph Sundberg, “UN Peacekeeping and Forced Displacement in South Sudan,” *International Peacekeeping* 27, no. 2 (2020). See also: Stian Kjeksrud, *Using Force to Protect Civilians: Successes and Failures of United Nations Peace Operations in Africa* (Oxford University Press, 2023).

80 UN Peacekeeping, “Improving Security of United Nations Peacekeepers: We Need to Change the Way We Are Doing Business,” November 29, 2017, p. 12; Christoph Dworschak and Deniz Cil, “Force Structure and Local Peacekeeping Effectiveness: Micro-Level Evidence on UN Troop Composition,” *International Studies Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (2022).

81 Cedric de Coning, “Peace Enforcement in Africa: Doctrinal Distinctions Between the African Union and United Nations,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 38, no. 1 (2017).

82 SADC, “SADC Mission in Mozambique.”

83 Cabo Ligado, “Cabo Ligado Monthly: October 2022 Special Report on Five Years of Conflict in Northern Mozambique,” November 23, 2022.

84 Tefesehet Hailu, “How Does the Withdrawal of SAMIM Affect AU’s Engagement in the Conflict in Northern Mozambique?,” *Amani Africa*, July 15, 2024.

85 Onuoha, Tchie, and Zabala, “A Quest to Win the Hearts and Minds.”

86 See, for example: Thomas Mandrup, “Lessons from the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM),” ACCORD, April 24, 2024.

87 Jasmine Opperman and Piers Pigou, “SAMIM Withdrawal from Cabo Delgado: Uncomfortable Truths,” *Institute for Security Studies*, May 30, 2024.

dimensional missions that can undertake a stronger mix of military-, police-, and civilian-led protection activities. Since 2000, when the publication of the Brahimi report highlighted the centrality of civilian components to the effectiveness of UN peace operations, the UN has strengthened its capacity in this area, and the number of civilian tasks mandated by the UN Security Council has increased dramatically in recent years. In addition, the UN has strengthened its policing capacity, with UN police undertaking critical POC activities, including through community engagement.<sup>88</sup> While the UN has been critiqued in some cases for using overly militarized approaches to protection,<sup>89</sup> it uses a whole-of-mission approach to POC, with civilians and police playing key roles. In particular, the UN has developed its capacity for community engagement, including through the work undertaken by missions' civil affairs components and community liaison assistants.

By contrast, African-led operations have primarily drawn on their military components for protection and have limited capacity to undertake community engagement with their smaller civilian and police components. While the AU recognizes the need to build the civilian and police capacity of its operations, particularly to improve community engagement, it has not been able to do so on the scale of the UN, partly due to financial constraints.

The fourth area is financing and other resources. A major comparative advantage of the UN vis-à-vis the AU is that its operations receive sustainable and flexible financing through assessed contributions.

African-led operations can more readily use force to respond to outbreaks of violence and contain aggressors.

While UN peacekeeping operations face resource challenges, they have a broader range of equipment, capabilities, assets, and expertise than what is readily available to the AU.<sup>90</sup> In general, African-led operations depend on external actors for financing and resources, leading to unsustainable and ad hoc financing that can hinder their operations.<sup>91</sup> For example, ATMIS faced significant funding challenges, “risking reversal of the hard-won security gains in Somalia.”<sup>92</sup> The MNJTF lacks sufficient funds to “sustain major operations,” has an “aging fleet of vehicles whose repair is increasingly not economically viable,” and lacks modern tools to counter improvised explosive devices.<sup>93</sup> In SAMIM, some personnel contended with food shortages and months of unpaid salaries.<sup>94</sup> This lack of adequate resources hinders the ability of these missions to fully execute their mandates, including on

POC.

A lack of resources have limited the number of civilian and police personnel within AU PSOs.<sup>95</sup> This lack of resources also makes it harder for African-led operations to dedicate the same level of capacity to undertake POC. Through POC working groups or mechanisms like MINUSCA's Senior Management Group for Protection, UN peacekeeping operations have dedicated coordination capacity focused on identifying threats to civilians and deciding how to either deter or respond to these threats. These mechanisms are further complemented by protection clusters that allow UN entities to coordinate on a broader range of protection issues. African-led PSOs do not have the same level of dedicated POC coordination structures as UN missions, although they do

88 Charles T. Hunt, “To Serve and Protect: The Role of UN Police in Protecting Civilians,” *IPI Global Observatory*, September 20, 2019; Charles T. Hunt, “Specialized Police Teams in UN Peace Operations: A Survey of Progress and Challenges,” *International Peace Institute*, March 2024.

89 See, for example: Jenna Russo, “Militarised Peacekeeping: Lessons from the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” *Third World Quarterly* 42, no. 12 (2021); Namie Di Razza, “Protecting Civilians in the Context of Violent Extremism: The Dilemmas of UN Peacekeeping in Mali,” *International Peace Institute*, October 2018.

90 See, for example: Alexandra Novoseloff, “Keeping Peace from Above: Air Assets in UN Peace Operations,” *International Peace Institute*, October 2017; Lisa Sharland, Jarrod Pendlebury, and Phillip Champion, “The Role of Air Power in UN Peacekeeping,” *Stimson Center*, April 17, 2024.

91 See: Paul D. Williams and Arthur Boutellis, “Partnership Peacekeeping: Challenges and Opportunities in the United Nations–African Union Relationship,” *African Affairs* 113, no. 451 (2014), p. 270; Andrew E. Yaw Tchie and Ndubuisi Christian Ani, “Standby Security Arrangements and Deployment Setbacks: The Case of the African Standby Force,” *Training for Peace*, October 2022.

92 Amani Africa, “One Year of ATMIS Operations: Progress, Challenges and Funding,” April 28, 2023; Bitania Tadesse, Zekarias Beshah, and Solomon Ayele Dersso, “Cash Strapped African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) Starts Its Second Year Facing Uncertain Financial Future,” *Amani Africa*, April 4, 2023.

93 AU Doc. PSC/PR/RPT.1197, January 30, 2024.

94 Amani Africa “Update Briefing on the Operations of SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM),” March 3, 2024.

95 Interview 16, expert, July 2024; Interview 21, expert, July 2024; Interview 26, expert, July 2024; Interview 43, AU official, September 2024.

undertake threat assessments. In terms of capacity, in most missions with POC mandates, the UN has a dedicated POC adviser who helps to ensure that POC is integrated into all mission activities.<sup>96</sup> African-led missions, by contrast, tend not to have the same level of dedicated capacity solely to POC. For example, in Somalia, in addition to the CCTARC (see Box 2), the AU has a protection, human rights, and gender unit responsible for areas including POC, human rights, IHL, conduct and discipline, and gender mainstreaming, though it has limited capacity to cover the entire mission area.<sup>97</sup>

The fifth area is the link between POC and political processes, which is important to facilitate sustainable protection. UN peacekeeping operations are intended to support political processes, and, in theory, all of a mission's work, including POC, should be planned and implemented in line with broader strategic and political objectives. While in some cases missions may struggle to influence national-level political processes, at the local level, UN mission personnel have demonstrated a willingness and ability to connect POC with local political efforts.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, there are still gaps when it comes to missions' efforts to embed POC within a broader political framework.

As with peacekeeping, member states and the UN secretary-general have reiterated the importance of linking peace enforcement with a broader political strategy. However, this can be difficult to do in practice, particularly if the actors leading the political process differ from those leading military operations. Nonetheless, in some cases, the AU has also been able to draw on in-country liaison offices and observer missions to connect military operations to political strategies. For example, following the transition from the African-led

International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) to MINUSMA in 2013, the AU deployed a political mission known as the AU Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL).<sup>99</sup> Designed to be a cooperation initiative with countries in the Sahel to combat terrorism and stabilize the region, MISAHEL was mandated to support Mali in the crisis-recovery process and help the countries of the Sahel with their security, governance, and development challenges.<sup>100</sup> While in theory the AU could further leverage the political role of its country liaison offices and observer missions in coordination with its enforcement operations, adequate resources and capacity have made this difficult to do in practice.<sup>101</sup>

Lack of resources makes it harder for African-led operations to dedicate the same level of capacity to POC.

## Strengthening the UN-AU Partnership on POC

The trend toward non-UN-led peace operations with a focus on peace enforcement and using counterterrorism approaches is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. As illustrated by the examples above, African-led PSOs have the potential to provide immediate physical protection for civilians in the short term. However, in most contexts, violence against civilians is a manifestation of wider institutional failure and structural issues within the host state. Thus, militarized responses should be seen as temporary measures to problems that require holistic and long-term responses. Given this reality, the AU and UN can learn from each other and strengthen their partnership to support POC in both the immediate and the long term.

This section focuses on how the AU and UN can strengthen their partnership and embrace a holistic vision of protection. It then identifies mechanisms to enhance coordination on POC, including

96 This is not the case for all UN missions, such as the UN Mission in Abyei (UNISFA), which did not have a POC adviser as of May 2024. See: UN Office of Internal Oversight Services, "Outcome Evaluation of the Implementation of the Protection of Civilians Mandate by the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA)," May 20, 2024, available at <https://oios.un.org/file/10321/download?token=QcxTnMVq>.

97 External feedback received February 2025.

98 Jenna Russo and Ralph Mamiya, "The Primacy of Politics and the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping," International Peace Institute, December 2022; Allard Duursma and Jenna Russo, "The Primacy of Politics at the Local Level in UN Peace Operations," International Peace Institute, February 2025.

99 African Union, "The African Union Strategy For The Sahel Region," August 11, 2014.

100 AU MISAHEL, "Mission de l'Union Africaine pour le Mali et le Sahel," available at <https://www.aumisahel.org/>.

101 Amani Africa, "The African Union Peace and Security Council Handbook 2023: Guide on the Council's Procedure, Practice and Traditions," 2023, p. 174.

between the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council and between the UN Secretariat and the AU Commission.

## Embracing a Holistic Approach to Protection

There are several steps the UN and AU can take to strengthen their partnership on POC. First, in the immediate term, the UN can continue collaborating with the AU and supporting accountability and compliance for all current missions that are mandated, authorized, endorsed, or recognized by the AU PSC.<sup>102</sup> AU officials working on the Compliance and Accountability Framework have had a very close relationship with teams from OHCHR to focus on how they can integrate POC, conduct and discipline, and human rights into missions. Stakeholders saw these engagements, and the work being undertaken by the UN to support accountability and compliance within specific missions (such as the FCG5S), as a positive model of partnership.<sup>103</sup> The AU-EU-UN Tripartite Partnership Project for the Enhancement of the Compliance and Accountability Framework for AU PSOs could also help catalyze collaboration between the UN and AU on POC.

Second, the AU can support the UN by sharing lessons on CHM from its experience with enforcement operations. Operations like AMISOM/ATMIS/AUSSOM, the MNJTF, and the FC-G5S have undertaken specific approaches to mitigate civilian harm through their operations. As one expert noted, “The UN could learn from the AU” on this front and apply lessons from African-led missions to UN missions with stabilization or protection mandates.<sup>104</sup> Equally, while the AU has started to document its lessons learned from PSOs, including on CHM, it could do this more systematically, especially in missions where the AU is not

The overall partnership between the UN and AU on protection should be grounded in the 2017 joint framework rather than the implementation of Resolution 2719.

in the lead but plays a supporting role.

Third, a range of interviewees said that the UN could help African-led PSOs strengthen their community engagement by sharing lessons with their civilian and police components.<sup>105</sup> This was seen as critical to helping the AU shift from a primarily militarized approach to POC toward a more comprehensive approach that includes working with communities to support peace initiatives and enhance local ownership. In particular, the AU could learn from the work undertaken by UN missions’ human rights and civil affairs divisions at the local level to build trust among communities and identify threats to civilians.

At the same time, in the short term, African-led operations are likely to remain focused on being “first responders” to outbreaks of violence, and interviewees stressed the need to manage expectations over their potential role in community engagement. Community engagement will also look different in peace enforcement contexts. It will therefore be important to draw lessons from initial

efforts by African-led missions to shift toward non-kinetic approaches, including the CIMIC cell in the MNJTF, which has managed community dialogues and conducted training on POC, gender-based violence, IHL, and IHRL.<sup>106</sup> By sharing lessons, the AU and UN can collaborate on understanding how community engagement can be undertaken in peace enforcement contexts, whether implemented directly by the mission or in partnership with other actors, and how this can contribute to POC.

## Enhancing Existing Coordination Mechanisms

The AU and UN have several existing mechanisms—both operational and strategic—that facilitate their partnership on peace operations.

102 AU, “Draft Guidelines for the Protection of Civilians.”

103 Interview 1, expert, July 2024; Interview 5, expert, July 2024; Interview 6, AU official, July 2024; Interview 7, AU official, July 2024; Interview 9, expert, July 2024; Interview 13, AU official, July 2024; Interview 17, expert, July 2024; Interview 26, expert, July 2024; Interview 27, AU official, July 2024; Interview 39, UN official, August 2024.

104 Interview 1, expert, July 2024.

105 Interview 6, AU official, July 2024; Interview 17, expert, July 2024.

106 Aniekwe and Brooks, “Multinational Joint Task Force.”



Through the joint task force on peace and security, senior officials from the two organizations have met regularly since 2010, and these meetings now happen annually. At the working level, there have been desk-to-desk meetings since 2008, with director-level meetings introduced in 2024. These meetings aim to prepare for and feed into the joint task force meetings and principal-level meetings between the AU chairperson and the UN secretary-general. The UN established an Office to the AU (UNOAU) in 2010. More recently, DPO and the AU PSOD created a joint task force on Resolution 2719.<sup>107</sup> The UN and AU also have mission-level coordination arrangements for specific settings, including the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy Working Group in Somalia, which regularly reviews civilian protection, community engagement, and human rights promotion and protection.<sup>108</sup> Collectively, these mechanisms serve as platforms for the two organizations to discuss and coordinate their efforts to advance peace and security in Africa. While many interviewees agreed that these existing coordination mechanisms are sufficient, the majority also noted that they are not being utilized effectively to coordinate on POC.

At the strategic level, interviewees suggested that the overall partnership between the UN and AU on protection should be grounded in the 2017 Joint Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security rather than the implementation of Resolution 2719.<sup>109</sup> It is unclear when a mission might be deployed through Resolution 2719,<sup>110</sup> and the core purpose of the resolution is to finance AU PSOs rather than to collaborate on issues such as POC.

At the level of the UN Security Council and AU Peace and Security Council, there is an opportunity to better leverage existing mechanisms for protection. For example, at the beginning of every month,

the chair of the AU PSC and the president of the UN Security Council have a meeting on the month's agenda, which UNOAU facilitates. However, because issues on protection can be particularly politically sensitive, some respondents noted that it would be useful to have earlier meetings between the two councils at the working level where protection issues can be raised informally.<sup>111</sup> In addition, some referenced the need for more systematic and regular meetings between the three African members of the Security Council (A3) and the AU PSC to allow the A3 to have a more unified voice on protection language in outcome documents. Because the A3 can serve as a bridge between the Security Council and AU PSC, this could help to advance the POC agenda in both councils.

More broadly, both councils will continue to play an important role in maintaining normative standards on protection and delivering clear mandates on POC in future missions. In theory, decisions over deploying a mission and which actor is best placed to lead that deployment should be taken strategically based on an assessment of threats of violence against civilians, political factors, and each actor's respective capabilities. In practice, however, while the UN Security Council always mandates operations led by the UN, the AU PSC does not always mandate African-led PSOs.<sup>112</sup> While a 2012 communiqué issued by the AU PSC notes that all mandates should include POC, vague language can "leave room for a lot of interpretation" in terms of how missions understand and implement POC.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, a few interviewees recommended that the AU PSC should consider including explicit and clear language in missions it mandates moving forward.<sup>114</sup> It could also provide clearer language or tasks around POC in missions it authorizes. In cases where the UN mandates a mission led by the AU or other actors, the UN General Assembly needs to ensure that the mission receives the requisite resources to

107 See footnote 70.

108 This working group comprises AMISOM/ATMIS/AUSSOM, the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia/UN Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM/UNTMIS), and the UN Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS).

109 See: UN News, "UN and African Union Launch Joint Task Force on Peace and Security," September 25, 2010; Interview 8, UN official, July 2024; Interview 9, expert, July 2024.

110 UN Security Council members have floated different contexts for implementing Resolution 2719. France has called for it to be used by the AU in the DRC, the UK has called for it to be used for the mission that would replace ATMIS in Somalia, and the US has called for it to be used in Sudan.

111 Interview 2, UN official, July 2024.

112 External feedback received March 7, 2025.

113 In 2012, the AU PSC issued a communiqué that POC "must form part of the mandate of future AU missions." See: African Union, *The 326<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union*, AU Doc. PSC/PR/BR/1.(CCCXXVI), June 26, 2012. Interview 22, UN official, July 2024.

114 Interview 13, AU official, July 2024; Interview 15, expert, July 2024; Interview 22, UN official, July 2024.

implement that mandate.

More collaboration is also needed at the working level to strengthen the AU and UN partnership on protection. In particular, there is a need to strengthen the UNOAU. This would involve rethinking how the UN Secretariat uses the UNOAU both for its engagement with the AU and as a service provider to the AU.<sup>115</sup> Both organizations can benefit from jointly analyzing lessons learned from current and past African-led PSOs.<sup>116</sup> This could be facilitated by a joint UN-AU lessons-learned mechanism, which could be embedded at UNOAU and work directly with PSOD. This mechanism could help to better leverage UNOAU's position and strengthen and improve the quality and consistency of exchanges between the two organizations.

There is also a need to consider how both organizations will collaborate on POC in future partnered operations. It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze how POC will feature in every possible future mission configuration. Nevertheless, regardless of what model is used, the UN and AU will benefit from developing a joint protection strategy that is tailored to the specific needs of any partnered operation. Because both organizations approach POC differently, they need to invest in understanding and addressing the unique context of any future mission and their respective comparative advantages, as well as areas of complementarity. Their mission-specific joint strategy should also prioritize the voices and experiences of local communities, rather than being solely shaped by directives from headquarters. This would allow the UN and AU to more effectively implement POC initiatives.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Over the past two decades, the UN and AU have developed distinct conceptual and operational approaches to the protection of civilians in their respective operations. These approaches bring

comparative advantages, limitations, and lessons learned. Moving forward, while neither the UN nor the AU should replicate the other's approach, the organizations can strengthen their partnership on POC to better deliver protection outcomes.

Based on the findings in this report, the following recommendations are made for the UN Secretariat, AU Commission, UN Security Council, and AU Peace and Security Council to guide existing and future discussions on the fate of POC.

### Understandings of POC:

- **UN DPO and AU PSOD should continue to hold collaborative discussions at the director, head of division, expert, and operational levels to facilitate understanding of the comparative advantages of both organizations on POC, as well as the challenges they face.** Personnel in both institutions need a clearer understanding of how their counterparts in the other conceptually understand and operationally approach POC. Each institution must be open to learning from the other to advance their partnership.
- **POC should be a central focus of efforts to implement the 2017 Joint Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security.** While the implementation of Resolution 2719 will require further discussion on POC, not all African-led operations will draw on that framework. It is therefore important to center POC within the 2017 joint framework to allow the UN and AU to jointly develop and institutionalize POC as part of their overall partnership.
- **UN DPO and AU PSOD should share lessons and build each other's capacity based on their relative strengths and comparative advantages, drawing on other UN actors (such as OHCHR) as appropriate.** The UN should continue to support accountability and compliance related to POC in African-led PSOs and consider broadening its support to focus on strengthening community engagement. For its part, the AU could share the

<sup>115</sup> At the time of writing, an internal review of the UNOAU office had already been conducted, but the report's findings had not been released.

<sup>116</sup> African Union, *Conclusions of the Inaugural Lessons Learned Forum on AU Peace Support Operations and the African Standby Force*, AU Doc. PSC/LLF/001, November 1–3, 2022; Andrew E. Yaw Tchie, "Generation Three and a Half Peacekeeping: Understanding the Evolutionary Character of African-led Peace Support Operations," *African Security Review* 32, no. 4 (2023); Cedric de Coning, Andrew E. Yaw Tchie, and Anab Ovidie Grand, "Ad-Hoc Security Initiatives, an African Response to Insecurity," *African Security Review* 31, no. 4 (2022).

experience of African-led PSOs with undertaking civilian harm mitigation to explore how this could be adapted to UN missions with stabilization or protection mandates in kinetic environments.

- **The AU compliance team should continue to support REC-led operations in adhering to the AU POC policy.** The AU POC policy is a guide for REC-led operations, and, in principle, they should follow the policy since they are embedded within the African Standby Force. Supporting REC-led operations in adhering to the POC policy will help ensure harmonization, consistent application, and clear expectations around POC for operations undertaken by RECs/RMs.

#### Structures on POC:

- **The UN and AU should create a joint lessons-learned mechanism in the UNOAU.** While the AU is already documenting and undertaking assessments of its operations, this could be done more systematically. A joint lessons-learned mechanism would conduct regular studies of joint UN-AU missions and African-led operations. Beyond identifying broader lessons learned, the mechanism could assess the effectiveness of efforts to implement POC policies. This would require enhancing the UNOAU's POC capacity. Versions of these assessments should be made publicly available to increase transparency and accountability.
- **UN DPO and AU PSOD should develop and implement a joint protection strategy when engaged in partnered operations.** The two institutions should put forward a holistic strategy for protection that emphasizes a rights-based approach, connects POC to a political strategy, and identifies linkages between organizational policies. The strategy should also address how both organizations will mitigate harm to civilians. Both organizations will need to work together to regularly analyze and assess protection needs to ensure their overall strategy and any activities are conflict-sensitive and adhere to “do no harm” principles.
- **UN DPO and AU PSOD should conduct a thorough joint POC assessment prior to any partnered deployments.** Such an assessment would need to take place prior to the development of the mandate, CONOPS, and ROE for a mission, including missions financed through Resolution 2719 or with the support of the UN. It should include a comprehensive assessment of POC that goes beyond a purely military assessment.
- **The AU Peace and Security Council and UN Security Council should engage in regular consultations on peace support operations, including on mandates.** Toward this end, they should systematically use existing structures for consultation between the two councils. These should also be supplemented with joint briefings, reports, and statements. This could help ensure that AU PSO mandates have precise and explicit language on POC rather than implicitly including POC through the framing of the mandate.

## Annex: Relevant UN and AU Policy and Guidance Documents

### UN Peacekeeping:

- Draft Operational Concept on the Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (2010)
- Protection of Civilian (POC) Resource and Capability Matrix for Implementation of UN Peacekeeping Operations with POC Mandates (2012)
- Policy on the Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping (2015)<sup>117</sup>
- Guidelines on the Role of United Nations Police in Protection of Civilians (2017)<sup>118</sup>
- Policy on the Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping (2019)<sup>119</sup>
- The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Handbook (2020)
- Policy on the Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping (2023)
- Protection of Civilians: Implementing Guidelines for the Military Component of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (2023)

### AU Peace Support Operations:

- 2009 Draft Guidelines for POC in AU PSOs
- Aide Mémoire for the Consideration of Issues Pertaining to the Protection of Civilians in Africa (2013)
- Establishment of the Civilian Casualty Tracking Analysis and Response Cell in the African Union Mission in Somalia, Pursuant to the Express Mandate Set Out in UN Security Council Resolution 2036 (2012)<sup>120</sup>
- African Union Policy on Conduct and Discipline for Peace Support Operations
- 2018 Draft AU Policy on Prevention and Response to SEA in PSOs and Draft Guidelines on Protection of Whistleblowers as well as the African Union Harmonized Training Standards on Protection of Civilians (2018)
- Revised African Union Doctrine on Peace Support Operations (2021)
- Strategic Framework for Compliance and Accountability in Peace Support Operations (2023)<sup>121</sup>
- AU Policy on POC (2023)

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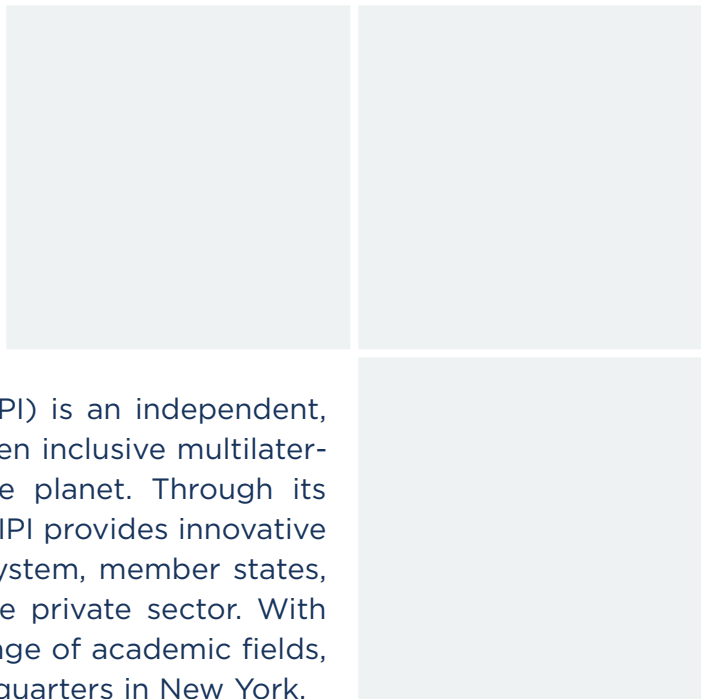
117 The 2015 policy was superseded by the 2019 policy.

118 This is currently under review.

119 The 2019 policy was superseded by the 2023 policy.

120 See: Rupesinghe, "The Civilian Casualty Tracking Analysis."

121 This was first piloted in 2021.



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