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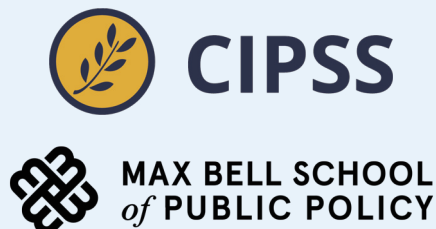
The Role of Ad Hoc Security Initiatives and Enterprise Security Arrangements in the Protection of Civilians in Africa

Andrew E. Yaw Tchie   SEPTEMBER 2025

Executive Summary

African states and regional organizations have increasingly turned to new forms of African-led security arrangements that differ in mandate, composition, and structure from African Union (AU)–led peace support operations. These ad hoc security initiatives (ASIs) and enterprise security arrangements (ESAs) have provided flexible and rapid responses to complex security threats. However, they are heavily militarized and poorly aligned with evolving frameworks for the protection of civilians (POC). They often operate outside formal AU structures, lack civilian components, rely on external training and support, and do not consistently draw on a coherent normative framework for POC.

These shortcomings can limit the effectiveness of ASIs and ESAs in protecting civilians. Protection frequently becomes secondary to counterinsurgency objectives, dependence on external actors fosters logistical weaknesses, and the absence of integrated civilian components undermines engagement with communities and broader peace processes. In addition, operations are often reactive and disconnected from political strategies that could address the governance and socioeconomic issues driving conflict. This can alienate local populations and reinforce their perception that protection is transactional or secondary to other interests.

Despite these challenges, some ASIs and ESAs have introduced community-centered practices that signal a possible shift. The Multinational Joint Task Force has established a Civil-Military Cooperation Cell to facilitate dialogue, employed quick-impact projects, and coordinated with humanitarian agencies, while Rwanda's deployment in Mozambique has undertaken outreach and medical support guided by the Kigali Principles. Such initiatives show the potential for more protection-conscious approaches, though these practices remain uneven and underdeveloped.

ASIs and ESAs are likely to remain as a feature of Africa's security landscape, reflecting the speed and adaptability of regional and bilateral deployments. Yet, if these deployments do not systematically integrate the AU POC policy, African Standby Force doctrine, and AU Compliance and Accountability Framework into their operations, their ability to deliver sustainable protection outcomes will remain limited. Stronger pre-deployment planning, the inclusion of AU civilian cells in the field, and alignment with broader political strategies are essential to ensure that these mechanisms contribute not only to counterinsurgency but also to the protection of civilians.

Introduction

Over the last two and a half decades, the United Nations has developed policies, guidelines, and tools to place the protection of civilians (POC) at the center of its peacekeeping operations. In parallel, and in part as a response to the Rwandan genocide and sustained violent conflict across parts of Africa, the African Union (AU) was established with a mandate to provide African-led responses to crises on the continent. Over time, the AU has emerged as a key security actor and partner in international security responses, often in conjunction or coordination with regional economic communities (RECs) and regional mechanisms (RMs).

This led to the development of various forms of African-led peace support operations (PSOs) designed to protect civilians and uphold the integrity of the state.[1] As these operations matured, the AU began formalizing protection standards and operating procedures. This process culminated in the AU's development of a POC policy and related guidelines intended to inform the efforts of African missions to prevent harm to civilians and reinforce the host state's responsibilities and capacity to uphold POC.

More recently, conflict-affected states and regional actors have increasingly turned to new forms of African-led security arrangements that differ in mandate, composition, and institutional structure from earlier AU PSOs. As a result, ad hoc security initiatives (ASIs) and enterprise security arrangements (ESAs) have gained prominence. These mechanisms—such as the former G5 Sahel Joint Force and the deployment of Ugandan forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)—offer flexible and rapid responses to complex security threats.[2] While rooted in African ownership, they often operate outside formal AU frameworks and are heavily militarized, with limited integration of

> Ad hoc security initiatives and enterprise security arrangements remain misaligned with evolving protection of civilians frameworks.

civilian capabilities that support a holistic approach to POC.

This paper argues that while ASIs and ESAs constitute an important new configuration in African-led security provision, they remain misaligned with evolving POC frameworks. It asks how these mechanisms can better integrate the AU's POC policy and guidelines and what role they might play in reshaping POC practices on the African continent.

Section one outlines the evolution of AU PSOs and the emergence of ASIs and ESAs. Section two examines key gaps and risks, particularly the militarized nature of these mechanisms and their limited integration of POC standards. Section three highlights emerging community-centered practices as potential entry points for more protection-conscious approaches. The brief concludes by reflecting on the broader implications for African-led PSOs.

This brief draws on over fifty semi-structured interviews with officials from the UN and AU, member-state representatives, civil society members, and experts on POC in African-led PSOs and UN peacekeeping operations conducted remotely from June 2024 to May 2025. It is also informed by textual analysis of AU policy documents and a review of UN material and relevant literature on UN and AU POC policy.

The Evolution and Advancement of African-Led PSOs

The growth of African-led PSOs from the early 1990s to the late 2020s was driven by African leaders who felt it was essential to take control of the growing insecurity emerging across the continent. During this period, the AU and RECs/RMs increasingly sought to develop Africa's capacity to deploy and conduct

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1   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 (October 2023).

2   Yf Reykers, John Karlsrud, Malte Brosig, Stephanie Hofmann, Cristiana Maglia, and Pernille Rieker, "Ad Hoc Coalitions in Global Governance: Short-Notice, Task- and Time-Specific Cooperation," *International Affairs* 99, no. 2 (March 2023).

PSOs of their own.[3] While these operations initially pursued a purely state-centric notion of security, around 2009 the AU began incorporating a people-centered approach.[4] Under this broadened understanding of security, the AU emphasized building state capacity to prevent harm and respond to threats to civilians.[5] Where the state fails to protect civilians, the AU has signaled that it will act.[6]

Unlike traditional UN peacekeeping operations, these African-led PSOs have not been deployed to implement ceasefires or peace agreements after the cessation of conflict. Rather, they have intervened with force amid ongoing conflict, whether to protect civilians (as in Darfur) or to support a state in stopping a violent insurgency (as in Somalia, the Central African Republic, Mali, and Comoros). When deployed to stop insurgencies, these missions have undertaken a form of peace enforcement and thus have differed from the traditional concept and rules of engagement of UN peacekeeping operations. Over the past decade and a half, the continued evolution of the conflict landscape in Africa has led to the emergence of ad hoc security initiatives (ASIs) aimed at addressing insecurity linked with various forms of insurgency. These have included the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad Basin and the former G5 Sahel Joint Force.[7]

ASIs have emerged as context-specific responses to armed groups that operate across borders at the regional level they also help alleviate the resource and funding challenges that have plagued deploy-ments under the ASF model. Each country is responsible for the costs associated with its operations, and the only financial support required is for the joint headquarters. International partners are assisting some national forces by providing fuel, rations, training, equipment, and by rapidly deploying alongside national security forces.

While each ASI is distinct, they share several critical characteristics.[8] First, by aiming to reduce or eliminate the threats posed by non-state armed groups, ASIs are ultimately a form of collective self-defense or "intervention by invitation," operating with host-state consent under Article 51 of the UN Charter and aligning with the AU's Common African Defence and Security Policy (CADSP).[9] This means that explicit authorization from the AU or the UN is not strictly required for their deployment. In practice, however, authorization from the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) has been sought and given to provide political legitimacy, credibility, logistical support, and funding.[10]

Second, formal legal arrangements underpin cross-border operations under each coalition arrangement, enabling participating countries to position contingents within another state's territory and pursue non-state armed actors across borders. However, ASIs are distinct from the AU's African Standby Force concept, which is designed to enable countries to deploy forces into host states but with a limited role for the host-state forces in supporting these efforts.[11] ASIs, by contrast, include national

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3   Linda Darkwa, "The African Standby Force: The African Union's Tool for the Maintenance of Peace and Security," *Contemporary Security Policy* 38, no. 3 (September 2017).

4   Amadu Sesay and Mashood Omotosho, "'Try Africa First': The African Union and Conflict Management in Africa: Opportunities and Challenges," *Africa Development* 32, no. 1 (2007).

5   Andrew E. Yaw Tchie and Lauren McGowan, "The United Nations–African Union Partnership and the Protection of Civilians," International Peace Institute, March 2025.

6   Article 4 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union allows the AU to intervene in a member state in the case of war crimes, genocide, or crimes against humanity. The AU can also intervene at the request of a member state.

7   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); Andrew E. Yaw Tchie, Fiifi Edu-Afful, Festus Kofi Aubyn, Ousmane Aly Diallo, and Mariana Llorens Zabala, "Shifting from External Dependency: Remodelling the G5 Sahel Joint Force for the Future," Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, June 2022; 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, January 2023.

8   Andrew E. Yaw Tchie, "Converging Global Norms and Institutional Policies with Bottom-Up Approaches to the Protection of Civilians," *Global Responsibility to Protect* (July 2025).

9   African Union, *Constitutive Act of the African Union*, July 11, 2000, Arts. 4(d), 4(e); Alexander Orakhelashvili, "Essence and Definition of *Collective Security*," in *Collective Security*, Nicholas Tsagourias, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

10   The Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army and MNJTF received endorsements from the UN Security Council in presidential statements, while the G5 Sahel Joint Force received unanimous approval in a Security Council resolution on June 20, 2017. The G5 Sahel specifically sought a Chapter VII mandate, which was dropped in the final resolution. The MNJTF had initially also sought a Chapter VII resolution but dropped this provision in its final request to the Security Council.

11   For example, under this model, Nigeria could not participate in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) force deployed within its own territory. This restriction hindered Nigeria's ability to combat Boko Haram in the northern part of the country. Thus, recognizing the transnational nature of the threats posed by the armed group, Nigeria and its neighboring countries agreed to adopt a regional approach to address the issue. Unfortunately, neither the African Standby Force nor UN peacekeeping operations were structured to effectively handle such transnational operations.

forces operating within their own territories.

Third, each participating country contributes resources to the force and is responsible for covering most operational costs, including troops' salaries. The only additional financial support required is for the joint headquarters, while international partners may assist some national forces by providing fuel, rations, training, or equipment. This approach helps alleviate some of the resource and funding challenges that have plagued deployments under the African Standby Force.

Alongside ASIs, enterprise security arrangements (ESAs) have emerged as another new kind of African-led PSO. These are defined as military deployments by another state or group of states to a host state, at its invitation, for an extended period.[12] ESAs are increasingly used to deal with insurgents, terrorists, or cross-border criminal activity or to repel armed groups from reentering a state's territory or planning further attacks. They operate in conjunction with host-state forces and can be indirectly linked to local political economies. These operations often pursue security across multiple layers, from individual security to local, national, regional, and, eventually, international security.

One prominent example of an ESA is the Accra Initiative, which was created to prevent the spillover of insecurity from the Sahel. The initiative deployed its first operation in May 2018 and eventually operated with a permanent secretariat in Accra and a headquarters in Tamale, Ghana, with focal points in each of its four other member states. Other examples of ESAs include the Alliance of Sahel States, a confederation established between Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso in July 2024 to focus on cross-border security; the DRC and Uganda's joint military operation against the rebel Allied Democratic Forces in eastern DRC in the autumn of 2021; and Rwanda's deployment of a 1,000-person contingent of troops and police to combat terrorism and insecurity in Cabo Delgado province at the request of the government of Mozambique.[13]

All these ESAs have been deployed without prior consultation with or authorization from the AU PSC. Yet as with ASIs, they have tried to link their efforts to the CADSP, which states that "the security of one African country is inseparably linked to the security of other African countries and the African continent as a whole."[14] While ESAs are different from ASIs in that they are not formally recognized by the AU, they often use established frameworks and doctrine from the UN and AU, including the African Standby Force, to further their cause.

The Limitations of ASIs and ESAs in Advancing POC

Despite the progress made with establishing the African Standby Force, most African-led PSOs—including ASIs and newer ESAs—are essentially ad hoc coalitions of the willing.[15] As such, they often circumvent the African Standby Force doctrine and AU POC policy, though they do tend to use aspects of their structures, trainings, and concepts.[16] ASIs and ESAs face five main limitations in their posture and capacity when it comes to POC. First, ASIs and ESAs are heavily militarized and prioritize military means as the ultimate solution to peace, security, and protection challenges. They often pursue counterinsurgency and enemy-centric strategies, including "clear, hold, build" and "hearts and minds" campaigns.[17] While designed to be population-centric,[18] such approaches often fail to adequately prioritize the protection of civilians or support to the civilian-led initiatives needed to sustain peace.[19] These missions' operational orientation centers on armed political competition, where success is measured not by the protection of

12 Tchie, "Converging Global Norms and Institutional Policies."

13 Ibid.

14 Orakhelashvili, "Essence and Definition of Collective Security."

15 Cedric de Coning, Leonne Gelot, and John Karlsrud, *The Future of African Peace Operations: From Janjaweed to Boko Haram* (London: Zed Books, 2016).

16 De Coning, Tchie, and Grand, "Ad-Hoc Security Initiatives."

17 Cedric de Coning and Andrew E. Yaw Tchie, "Enhancing the Effectiveness of African-Led Peace Support Operations through an Adaptive Stabilisation *Approach," Journal of International Peacekeeping* 26, no. 4 (2023).

18 US Department of the Army, *The US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3–24* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Andrew E. Yaw Tchie, "African-Led Stabilisation: A Normative Framework or Organised Practical Response to Insecurity?" *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 27, no. 3 (2024).

19 Andrew E. Yaw Tchie and Ingvild Bode Brodtkorb, "Confronting Escalating Threats: Adapting Stabilisation for Africa's Twenty-First Century Security Challenge," forthcoming in *Journal of Critical African Studies* (2025).

civilians but by the disruption of insurgents' influence among local populations.[20]

Second, these deployments often rely on external support and training, especially from France, the UK, the US, and non-Western military actors. These actors often introduce context-insensitive doctrines and foster logistical dependencies. Many troops and police deployed to ASIs and ESAs have received counterinsurgency training, which can shape their engagement, leading them to pursue a hard militarized approach to civilian protection, often without sufficient equipment or logistical support. As a result, these forces may retreat or disengage under pressure, exposing civilians to greater harm as a consequence of their engagement. When such training is not paired with political strategies that prioritize POC and peacebuilding efforts, operations are left ill-equipped to deliver responsive protection and become vulnerable to escalation or retaliation by armed groups.

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Third, African-led PSOs—including ASIs and ESAs—lack integrated civilian components, particularly civilian experts and police officers. This gap undermines their ability to implement POC mandates or engage meaningfully in broader peace processes. While some progress has been made—for instance, the integration of AU civilian cells in the MNJTF—civilian roles remain underdeveloped and under-resourced across ASIs and ESAs. Cross-mission knowledge sharing, stronger pre-deployment training, and clearer delineation of civilian responsibilities would help enhance both the legitimacy and the impact of these missions' POC efforts.

Fourth, ASIs and ESAs lack a coherent normative framework for the specific environments they operate in. Such a framework should draw on and be grounded in shared AU and UN principles,

including international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and the AU Constitutive Act. It should also draw on existing tools such as the AU POC policy, the African Standby Force doctrine, and the AU Compliance and Accountability Framework (AU CAF).[21] Rather than fixed templates, what is needed is planning capacity and adaptive guidance.[22]

Finally, the cumulative effect of militarized responses, limited civilian capacity, and donor-driven support models has significant implications for these missions' legitimacy and protection outcomes. The failure of these missions to integrate political strategies to address the governance and socioeconomic issues driving conflict can alienate local populations and reinforce their perception that protection is transactional or secondary to other interests.[23] As one interviewee noted, missions on the continent "have been stuck in and often pivot towards a self-centered, [self-]referencing approach" instead of focusing on the roots of protection challenges.[24] This dynamic can harm the reputation of these missions and generate mistrust—particularly when the missions fail to provide protection or troops are implicated in misconduct. Without a shift in approach, ASIs and ESAs risk doubling down on ineffective strategies, inadvertently undermining their own objectives and degrading long-term protection outcomes.

ASIs and ESAs must not become ends in themselves. Their effectiveness hinges on whether they are paired with robust political strategies and political leadership that is willing to think outside the box. The 2017 Joint UN–AU Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace Operations provides a potential avenue for integrating these operations into broader efforts to promote adaptive stabilization and inclusive governance. Anchoring

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20 United States Department of State, "US Government Counterinsurgency Guide," January 2009, p. 12.

21 The AU CAF has been designed to strengthen the AU's capacity to ensure that its peace support operations are not only planned and executed with precision but also uphold the highest standards of international human rights law and humanitarian principles. This initiative, a collaborative effort among the AU, European Union (EU), and UN, embodies a shared commitment to excellence in conduct and discipline.

22 Tchie and McGowan, "The United Nations–African Union Partnership."

23 Paul D. Williams, "Protection, Resilience and Empowerment: United Nations Peacekeeping and Violence against Civilians in Contemporary War Zones," *Politics* 33, no. 4 (2013).

24 Interview with UN official, September 5, 2024.

ASIs and ESAs in political frameworks—including through joint deployments with special political missions and sustained diplomacy—can help ensure they contribute to longer-term protection, legitimacy, and peacebuilding. This is important given that there are now more ESAs than ASIs. In principle, some ASIs have adopted the AU CAF and received help from the AU to develop POC strategies, while other ASIs have had arrangements with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to apply the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) when receiving UN support. ESAs also need a way to draw on these mechanisms and a common way of operating in these high-risk contexts. However, there are no mechanisms to ensure compliance or enforce either the AU CAF or the HRDDP in ASIs or ESAs.

Community-Centered Approaches to Protection

ASIs and ESAs often default to militarized, enemy-centric counterinsurgency strategies, sidelining political strategies that could address the roots of violence and insecurity.[25] As a result, their approach typically lacks a peacebuilding component and is unable to deliver sustainable protection outcomes.[26] Missions also frequently lack sufficient and complementary support capacities—such as civilian personnel, language skills, mobility, and enabling units. This can limit their ability to provide protection, create trust deficits with the local populations, and complicate exit strategies.[27]

> Some ASIs and ESAs have begun to experiment with community-centered practices based on lessons learned from past interventions.

Despite these limitations, some ASIs and ESAs have begun to experiment with community-centered practices based on lessons learned from past interventions. At the heart of these new approaches is a recognition that building relationships with communities is key to effective protection and the establishment of a broader protective environment. For example, Rwanda's bilateral deployment to Mozambique has focused on implementing the Kigali Principles, a set of eighteen nonbinding pledges to improve the protection of civilians in UN peacekeeping operations. Toward that end, Rwandan troops have conducted medical outreach, community dialogue programs, and community-based quick impact projects.[28]

The MNJTF has also sought to shift toward a more community-centered approach. In 2020, it created a joint Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) Cell with the Lake Chad Basin Commission to facilitate cooperation between security forces, humanitarian agencies and other civilian entities, and local communities. The civil-military dialogue and consultations facilitated by this cell have reportedly played a critical role in shaping the MNJTF's approach to non-kinetic operations. The cell has also organized community dialogues that helped build relationships and trust between soldiers and affected communities. In addition, to support these dialogues, the MNJTF implemented quick-impact projects such as food distribution, schools and borehole construction, and the provision of medical and veterinary supplies in areas inaccessible to humanitarian agencies.[29] The mission has engaged with communities on planning and deployments. These efforts have been supported by the AU cell embedded in the MNJTF. Taken together, these practices suggest that some ASIs and ESAs are beginning to integrate community engagement into protection strategies and broader peacebuilding efforts.

25 Tchie, "Generation Three and a Half Peacekeeping."

26 De Coning and Tchie, "Enhancing the Effectiveness of African-Led Peace Support Operations."

27 Andrew E. Yaw Tchie and Lauren McGowan, "Protection of Civilians in Partnered Peace Operations: Future Approaches of the United Nations and the African Union," International Peace Institute, 2025.

28 Thomas Mandrup, Craig Moffat, Andrew E. Yaw Tchie, Gwinyayi A. Dzinesa, Rui Saraiva, and Ingvild Brodtkorb, "The Effectiveness of the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM)," Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, forthcoming; Rory Shield, "Rwanda's War in Mozambique: Road-Testing a Kigali Principles Approach to Counterinsurgency?" *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 35, no. 1 (2023).

29 Christian C. Aniekwe and Karen Brooks, "Multinational Joint Task Force: Lessons for Comprehensive Regional Approaches to Cross-Border Conflict in Africa," *Journal of International Peacekeeping* 26, no. 4 (2023).

Implications for African-Led Protection

ASIs and ESAs are likely to remain features of a new generation of African-led PSOs, particularly given the increased capacity of several individual states on the African continent to deploy troops. Regional arrangements have also proven their ability to meet security needs during their initial deployment, which is quicker than that of AU-led PSOs and UN peacekeeping operations. For example, the deployment of the MNJTF, G5 Sahel Joint Force, Uganda-DRC operations in eastern DRC, and Accra Initiative reflect a trend in the use of deployments to deal with transnational security threats. Additionally, missions like the MNJTF are increasingly being asked to expand their operations to response to climate-related peace and security challenges and humanitarian crises. Such deployments are also more likely at a time when the multilateral system and rules-based order are under pressure, and many member states are interpreting international law and global norms in their own way. Nonetheless, the absence of explicit and standardized POC objectives and guidelines for ASIs and ESAs has undermined their capacity to deliver on the imperative to protect civilians.

To address this, ASIs and ESAs should more systematically apply the AU Compliance and Accountability Framework, including by integrating AU civilian cells in the field to support implementation and oversight. If they receive support from the UN, they will also require support to adhere to the UN's Human Rights Due Diligence Policy.[30] Sustained and increased investment in pre-deployment planning is also essential. Troop-contributing countries must be better equipped to assess POC needs, supported by joint expertise from AU and UN partners.[31] This would help ensure that civilian protection is prioritized in strategic decision-making and informs the design of mandates, resource allocations, and any joint operations or political support.

Looking ahead, ASIs and ESAs should be seen as an opportunity to rethink how flexible security initiatives and localized approaches can help foster more responsive and politically grounded protection strategies. Existing AU and UN frameworks may need to be revisited to reflect the dynamic context in which these missions operate. Lessons from ASIs and ESAs—particularly those that have blended military responses with efforts to build legitimacy and adapt to local needs through community engagement—should inform future policy and operational thinking around POC.

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30 The UN-wide framework ensures that any support provided by UN entities to non-UN security forces adheres to the UN's human rights obligations. This policy requires a process for assessing risks, preventing harm, and taking action when credible information suggests that a recipient of support is committing human rights violations. The goal is to uphold international human rights law and maintain the legitimacy of the UN.

31 Andrew E. Yaw Tchie and Lauren McGowan, "Protection of Civilians in Partnered Peace Operations: Future Approaches of the United Nations and the African Union," International Peace Institute, 2025.

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