

Explaining Variation in African Union Peace Mission Effectiveness: Mandate Design and Host-State Cooperation in Somalia and Darfur

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Abstract

This article looks at the effectiveness of African Union (AU) peace missions, specifically the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). Using a comparative case study approach and based on the third-party intervention theory, it suggests that the different mission outcomes stem from the differences in mandate design and host-state cooperation. The mandate of AMISOM was relatively strong and flexible, and the cooperation of the Federal Government of Somalia was strong, which led to enabling conditions for military stabilization. UNAMID's nebulous mandate and the Sudanese government's obstructions, on the other hand, imposed severe constraints on civilian protection and territorial control. The study makes a contribution to peacekeeping scholarship through the identification of the key elements of mandate robustness and host-state cooperation as being jointly necessary, non-sufficient and offers recommendations to enhance future peacekeeping missions by the AU.

Keywords:

African Union; Peace Missions; Mandate Design; Host-State Cooperation; AMISOM; UNAMID; Peacekeeping Effectiveness

1. Introduction

The African Union (AU) has come to play a more central role in the management of conflicts in Africa since its inception in 2001. The AU differs from its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) by its explicit right to intervene in member states in situations of grave circumstances, including

war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity (African Union, 2000; Williams, 2011). This change marked the changing attitudes toward collective security and peace enforcement in Africa, which made the AU a significant third party player in IR and PC (Williams, 2018).

These institutional achievements have come with widely varying results from AU peace missions. Some interventions have helped to achieve stabilisation in a meaningful way, while others have not managed to meet core mandates, such as civilian protection and long-term peace building, especially in this latter respect (de Coning, 2013; Tchie, 2017). There are several possible explanations for this variation in existing scholarship: troop size, logistical aspects, and international financial assistance (Fortna, 2008; Howard, 2008). But comparatively little systematic focus has been directed towards the interaction of mandate design and host-state cooperation, especially in the African-led interventions. This article fills that void.

This study addresses the central research question of why are some AU peace missions more effective than others in Somalia and Darfur, and how does the effectiveness of these missions relate to the design of the mandates and the cooperation between the host state and the AU mission? The article suggests that missions with more clearly defined, clearly enforced mandates and more support from the host state have greater chances of delivering tangible security and humanitarian results than missions that are limited in their support by the host state and have less clear mandates (Fortna, 2008; de Coning, 2013). The two cases (AMISOM and UNAMID) are well suited for this comparison analytical reasons because they fit the peace and security agenda of the AU and they have very different

scores on both explanatory variables and on outcomes.

Furthermore, this study has three contributions. First, it furthers the scholarship of third-party intervention by bringing the relationship between institutional and political factors to the fore. Second, it offers an empirically based comparative discussion of two major operations of the AU. Third, it provides policy-relevant suggestions for enhanced future mission design.

2. Conceptual, Theoretical, and Methodological Framework

2.1. Key Concepts

Third-party intervention is when a third party becomes involved in the management of or resolution of a conflict between contesting parties (Bercovitch, 1997). In the context of the AU, these measures are usually multi-faceted; they include a military, political and humanitarian dimension (Williams, 2018). Peace mission effectiveness is measured in three dimensions: (i) decrease in armed violence; (ii) territorial and political stability; and (iii) protection of civilians. This operationalization is consistent with existing peacekeeping scholarship, which focuses on the security and humanitarian dimensions of peacekeeping (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006; Fortna, 2008).

Mandate design is the formality and operation of the authorization and mandate of a peace mission in terms of the objectives, rules of engagement, and enforcement mechanisms. This includes from traditional observer to "strong peace enforcement" operations (Bellamy & Williams, 2010). Host-state cooperation involves the degree of cooperation, tolerance, or hindrance to mission activities on the part of the host government. Cooperation can have varying degrees, ranging from full participation and sharing of intelligence to selective compliance and even obstruction (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006; de Waal, 2016).

2.2. Theoretical Framework

This study builds on the conditional success approach to peacekeeping theory that argues for the success of interventions to be influenced by certain enabling conditions: a clear and achievable mandate, sufficient resources, and the presence of local actors who cooperate with the peacekeeping force

(Howard, 2008; Fortna, 2008). This is consistent with other institutionalist accounts in IR that highlight the mutual influence between the institutional structure and the political environment on our outcomes (Doyle & Sambanis 2006). There is an institutional dimension to intervention (mandate design), and there is a political dimension (host-state cooperation). This is not either of the two variables alone, but their interaction.

2.3. Research Design and Methodology

This study adopted structured comparative case study, which has been widely used in Peace and Conflict Studies for causal analysis of complex phenomena in a handful of cases (George & Bennett, 2005). The selection of AMISOM and UNAMID was identified by a most similar systems design – both are AU authorised missions in sub-Saharan Africa conflict areas in a similar regional institutional context, though in different eras. The primary difference is in the independent variables, which require design and host-state cooperation, as well as mission outcomes, which render the cases analytically fruitful for causal inference.

Systematic analyses of primary sources such as AU Peace and Security Council resolutions, UN Security Council resolutions, and official mission reports as well as secondary sources obtained from peer-reviewed journals, academic monographs, and policy institute publications were used to collect evidence. The analytical model is simple, namely, the presence or absence of the two independent variables, Mandate design and Host-state cooperation, along with their interaction and effect on the dependent variable, Mission effectiveness are measured in each case and then assessed in terms of the three dimensions stated above.

3. Comparative Case Analyses

3.1. Case I: Somalia and AMISOM

a. Background and Mandate

Somalia has experienced protracted state collapse since the fall of the Siad Barre regime, since the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in 1991, Somalia has been a state in a state of collapse that has created a divided society of clan militias and warlords, and finally the rise of Al-Shabaab-inspired Islamist insurgency. (Menkhaus, 2014). Although limited success has been seen with past UN led

interventions in the 1990s, this was mainly due to the lack of strong local institutions and the lack of political consensus (Doyle & Sambanis, 2006). Mid-2000s saw worsening conditions and a resurgence of a regional response.

The AMISOM was created in 2007 by the AU Peace and Security Council, with the approval of the UN Security Council. Its first task was to assist the Transitional Federal Government, facilitate humanitarians and to establish conditions for stabilisation. Notably, however, the mandate was significantly expanded over time, to include offensive action against Al-Shabaab and specific counterinsurgency operations. The path taken is a representative example of what Bellamy and Williams (2010) term the 'robust turn' of peacekeeping missions, which empowers them to take action beyond self-defence.

In reality, the mandate of AMISOM was unambiguous, flexible and gradually became more robust. The forces from Uganda, Burundi, Kenya and Ethiopia were given permission to conduct joint offensive operations, to secure key population centres and to assist Somali security sector development (Williams, 2018; Tchie, 2022). This clarity in action, which was unusual for missions in AU, enabled the provisioning of mandates to be translated into concrete military action.

b. Host-State Cooperation

One distinguishing aspect of the Somali case is the relatively high, yet fragile, level of cooperation by the host state. AMISOM was a lifeline for the Somali government, both the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the subsequent governments, with respect to their ability to survive and control their territory. This reliance left powerful structural incentives for alignment with AU goals (Williams, 2018). Cooperation was seen in such things as joint military planning, intelligence sharing and accepting a massive foreign military presence. Sovereignty issues did not cause resistance, but Somalia's leaders welcomed and maintained foreign intervention.

Cooperation was incomplete, however. Ongoing coordination challenges and issues stemming from weak state institutions, internal political polarization and the capacity constraints of Somali security forces reduced

the sustainability of gains (Menkhaus, 2014). These constraints are real but they were not a fundamental reversal of this enabling dynamic of host-state alignment.

c. Effectiveness Assessment

AMISOM has moderate to high performance on all three dimensions of effectiveness. In the area of violence reduction, the mission had important effects on the conventional military capability of Al-Shabaab, but it left it with insurgent ability through asymmetric means. In terms of territorial stability, AMISOM recovered Mogadishu and some other key urban centres, changing the territorial landscape. However, civilian protection was less consistent - while security was improved in cleared areas, there was continuing loss of life and displacement in other locations. Despite all this, AMISOM is generally considered one of the more successful in military terms (AMISOM) among the other AU peace operations (Williams, 2018; Tchie, 2022).

3.2. Case II: Darfur and UNAMID

a. Background and Mandate

Political exclusion and economic marginalisation were the causes of the outbreak of the Darfur conflict in 2003, in which two main rebel groups, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), armed themselves against the Sudanese government (Flint & de Waal, 2008). The counterinsurgency strategy of the central government in Khartoum brought extensive violence, mass killings, forced displacement, and destruction of livelihoods, thanks to the use of proxy militia groups (the Janjaweed) (de Waal, 2007). Within a few years, the situation in Darfur became one of the worst early twenty-first century humanitarian crises (Prunier, 2007).

The African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) arrived before the others, but with limited capacity due to resource constraints. It was handed over to UNAMID, the first hybrid peacekeeping mission co-led by the AU and the UN in 2007 under the UN Security Council Resolution 1769. UNAMID had a broad, multidimensional mandate, including civilian protection, humanitarian facilitation, peace process support, and human rights monitoring. Resolution 1769 had granted the mission force the authority to take 'all necessary means' to

protect the civilian population, which indicated that it would have strong powers of enforcement.

But in reality, the mandate had a major miss in terms of implementation. This hybrid management system involving coordination between the AU and the UN bureaucracies with their distinctive institutional cultures and reporting lines created command ambiguity and delays in decision making (de Coning, 2020). The operational guidelines for the use of force were ambiguous and the political clauses in the design of UNAMID reduced its power to enforce (Johnstone, 2011). Thus, the mandate was formal and yet very weak operationally.

b. Host-State Cooperation

Unlike Somalia, the Sudanese government adopted a stance of declarative, and carefully managed, engagement with UNAMID. In theory, the mission was accepted by Khartoum as part of the international engagement, but in fact, it was seen as a threat to the country's sovereignty and political control (de Waal, 2016). The government systematically undermined the effectiveness of UNAMID operations, causing delays in access to the country, in obtaining visas, and in customs clearance of equipment, as well as interfering with UNAMID patrol operations and restricting access to sensitive conflict areas (Johnstone, 2011).

The plan to pursue strategic non-compliance is similar to de Waal's (2016) notion of a 'containment strategy' that permits international entities onto the country's territory while ensuring their activities are supervised and restricted. What resulted was a downgrade of UNAMID's mandate to merely monitor and coordinate humanitarian operations, well short of its civilian protection mandate.

c. Effectiveness Assessment

The effectiveness of UNAMID in all three dimensions was severely constrained. The mission reported some successes in reducing violence at the local level, but had not yet shifted the arc of violence and displacement on an overall scale, as these persisted. UNAMID presence and monitoring were weak and inconsistent on territorial stability with large areas effectively inaccessible. With regard to the protection of civilians, the most visible

mission objectives for which outcomes were explicitly stated were weak: attacks against civilians persisted, with little deterrent effect from the mission (de Waal, 2016; de Coning, 2020). The general view of the scholars is that UNAMID failed badly in its mandate (Johnstone, 2011; Prunier, 2007).

4. Comparative Discussion

4.1. Mandate Design: Robustness versus Operational Ambiguity

The main difference between the two missions is the transformation of their authorisation into their everyday operations. AMISOM's mandate, even if constrained by limited resources, was clear, progressively enhanced and institutionally coherent. This clarity allowed field commanders to make key operational decisions and respond to evolving conflict dynamics. The institutional complexity of UNAMID's hybrid structure, on the other hand, jeopardized its mandate. The AU-UN dual command did not leverage the advantages of both organisations, but rather weakened accountability and decision-making. The key lesson here is that paper mandates are not necessarily robust in action. The key is how clear, enforceable and protected from dilution mandates are.

4.2. Host-State Cooperation: A Spectrum, Not a Binary

It also shows that in most peacekeeping operations, the consent of the host-state – a prerequisite for most peace missions to come into effect – does not ensure cooperation at the long run. Sudan officially agreed to UNAMID, but has not substantially cooperated. This distinction is both important analytically and not discussed enough in the literature, where consent and cooperation are used as synonyms. In fact, host governments have many instruments for managing and containment after they formally accept missions. Although Somalia's cooperation was flawed, it was nevertheless substantive, operationally significant, and reflected a real need for strategic engagement with AMISOM. This provided an actual operating leverage for mission. For theory, the term 'formal consent' versus 'substantive operational co-operation' needs to be better differentiated in future analyses of peacekeeping effectiveness.

4.3. Interaction Effects and Rival

Explanations

The comparative evidence bolsters the main thesis that the outcome difference is not solely due to the mandate design or host-state cooperation. The success of AMISOM depended on having an effective mandate and a friendly environment. Similarly, in the obstructive environment in Sudan, a strong mandate would have yielded little results, while in Somalia, the cooperative government would not have been able to achieve stability without the operational framework that AMISOM had established. Both two variables are co-essential.

It is more of a credible alternative suggestion that AMISOM is indeed succeeding because of the other available resources and international funding especially from the European Union and United Nations than mandate or cooperation dynamics. This explanation has some credence because there was a true resource differential between the two missions. It does not however, explain all of the variation in outcome. UNAMID also was a well-resourced mission: budget constraints were not the major constraint in particular, but rather political and institutional constraints. Likewise, the relative weakness of Somalia as a state is not enough to explain the success of AMISOM. State fragility posed challenges as well as opportunities for AMISOM, and AMISOM would not have been effective if the host state was unable to withstand it.

4.4. Implications for Peacekeeping Theory

The results of this research contribute to previous theories in two ways. First, they reinforce the conditional success framework, which has been developed mainly for UN operations, and shows how it can be applied to interventions in Africa (Fortna, 2008; Doyle & Sambanis, 2006). Second, they further develop the framework by splitting host-state behaviour into consent and substantive cooperation, which has theoretical and policy implications. The study also demonstrates that a reductionist approach to peacekeeping outcomes, based on the size of the troops or the amount of money invested, is not sufficient; rather, institutional design and political environment are fundamentally important.

5. Conclusion

This article aimed to illuminate the reasons for the varying effects of AU peace missions in a shared institutional environment. It has shown that the differences in mandate design and cooperation with the host states lie at the heart of understanding the differences between AMISOM and UNAMID. The relative effectiveness of AMISOM is due to the strong and flexible mandate and substantive support from the host state. UNAMID's constraints are due to the "egregious ambiguity of mandate and the orchestrated obstruction by the host government. These results align with the literature that has documented that peace mission effectiveness is a conditional outcome, which is a result of not only institutional design, but also of the political context in which missions operate.

The study has implications that extend beyond the two cases studied. The design of operations at the beginning of each operation is likely to affect outcomes in ways that will be hard to change when missions are sent out across the continent as the AU deepens its role. With the role of the AU deepening and a focus on new hybrid arrangements and successor missions, the design choices made at the beginning of each operation are likely to shape outcomes in ways that will be difficult to change once in play. It is therefore not the only intellectual challenge but also a practical imperative to understand the conditions under which effectiveness is enabled.

6. Policy Recommendations

The analysis leads to five policy recommendations. First, the AU should not focus so much on the form of the mandate as on its meaning and enforceability. Mandates or directives are weaker in practical use than instructions that are not so broad but are so clear. Second, securing real host-state cooperation, rather than just formal consent, should become a prerequisite to mission deployment, and mission review should incorporate cooperation measures. Third, command structures in hybrid AU-UN missions must be streamlined and defined so as to avoid the bureaucratic build-up of UNAMID. Fourth, the AU must further strive to develop a greater financial independence by strengthening the financial capacity of the Peace Fund, thus lessening its reliance on external partners who may have different priorities than the missions. Finally, mission

design should be context dependent: different political contexts in different host countries call for different approaches to operations and not for standard operating procedures.

The framework could be extended to other missions in AU, such as those in Mali, Central African Republic and Mozambique, but further research is needed to establish the generalizability of the framework. Special consideration must be given to instances where mandate design and host-state cooperation are working at cross purposes, where they both have the strongest impact to test the relative weight of each variable. It would be valuable to conduct a longitudinal study of changes in cooperation that take place during the lifespan of a mission as well.

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