

United Nations Peacekeeping in Africa: Evolution, Operational Experience and Lessons from Major Peace Operations

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ABSTRACT

United Nations peacekeeping in Africa has evolved from ceasefire monitoring into multidimensional intervention encompassing civilian protection, political transition, electoral assistance, disarmament and post-conflict peacebuilding. Yet broader mandates have produced markedly different outcomes across missions. This paper examines the evolution and operational experience of UN peacekeeping through a comparative analysis of operations in Namibia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, Angola and Burundi. It considers how political and operational conditions interacted to shape mission outcomes, focusing on commitment to negotiated settlements, acceptance of electoral

outcomes, mandate credibility, management of spoilers, disarmament, regional cooperation and sustained international engagement. The comparison shows that Namibia and Mozambique benefited from conditions that enabled peacekeeping to reinforce viable political settlements and support the movement of political competition from armed confrontation into institutional processes. Rwanda demonstrates the consequences of inadequate capability and political commitment in a rapidly deteriorating security environment, while Somalia illustrates the limitations of coercive intervention in the absence of a viable political settlement. Angola highlights the fragility of peace implementation when powerful actors retain military alternatives to electoral competition, whereas Burundi demonstrates the contribution of multidimensional peacekeeping within a longer process of domestic negotiation and regional engagement. The paper argues that the evolution of UN peacekeeping in Africa is better understood through the relationship between political settlement and operational intervention than through mandate expansion alone. Durable outcomes are more likely where political commitment, credible mandates, operational capacity and regional support reinforce one another. These findings underline the need for politically grounded and operationally realistic peacekeeping strategies capable of supporting institutions that can sustain peaceful political competition beyond mission withdrawal.

Keywords: United Nations; peacekeeping; Africa; peace operations; political settlements; conflict management; peacebuilding

INTRODUCTION

United Nations peacekeeping has become one of the most consequential forms of multilateral intervention in armed conflict. Since its emergence in 1948, peacekeeping has developed from a comparatively restrained mechanism for monitoring ceasefires and separating opposing forces into a complex system of military, political and civilian intervention. Contemporary missions may be required simultaneously to protect civilians, facilitate political dialogue, support elections, promote human rights, assist disarmament and demobilisation, strengthen state institutions and create conditions for longer-term peacebuilding. This expansion has increased the political importance of peacekeeping while making its effectiveness considerably more difficult to assess. Seventy-five years of operational experience suggest an institution capable of substantial adaptation, but one that remains constrained by changing geopolitical interests, contested consent, expanding mandates and the continuing tension between political settlement and coercive action (Duursma et al., 2023).

Africa has been central to this transformation. Many of the conflicts confronting peacekeepers on the continent have involved civil war, fragmented armed organisations, contested political authority, regional involvement and severe threats to civilian populations. Peacekeeping has consequently been required to operate within conflicts where the distinction between maintaining an existing peace and helping to construct one is often unclear. Empirical research based on African missions confirms that peacekeepers are frequently deployed to difficult conflict environments and towards locations experiencing significant violence, although deployment can be delayed and geographically uneven (Ruggeri et al., 2018). The speed of deployment itself is shaped by the incentives, capabilities and political constraints of troop-contributing states,

illustrating how operational effectiveness remains dependent upon decisions made well beyond the immediate conflict environment (Lundgren et al., 2021).

The resulting record is more complex than the conventional opposition between peacekeeping success and failure suggests. A substantial body of research indicates that international peacekeeping can contribute to reducing violence and improving the durability of negotiated settlements. Yet the mechanisms through which these effects arise are neither uniform nor automatic. Matanock and Lichtenheld (2022) find that conditional incentives employed by peace operations are associated with a lower risk of conflict recurrence, suggesting that peacekeepers can influence belligerent behaviour without relying primarily upon military coercion. Clayton and Dorussen (2022) similarly demonstrate that peacekeeping and mediation can operate as complementary forms of conflict management, with transformative peacekeeping strengthening the effectiveness of mediation in terminating post-Cold War civil conflicts. These findings place political processes at the centre of peacekeeping effectiveness rather than treating military deployment as an independent solution to armed conflict.

This political dimension has become increasingly important as mission mandates have expanded. Contemporary peacekeeping operations are often assigned multiple security, political and peacebuilding responsibilities that must be pursued simultaneously under conditions of continuing violence. Evidence from African operations between 1998 and 2016 shows that mandate fragmentation can impede implementation, particularly where missions are expected to perform disparate peacebuilding functions alongside immediate security responsibilities (Blair et al., 2022). The problem is therefore not simply whether a mandate is sufficiently ambitious. Attention must also be given to whether its constituent responsibilities are

politically coherent, appropriately prioritised and practically implementable. This distinction is critical when evaluating African missions whose formal mandates may appear comprehensive while the political and operational conditions necessary for implementation remain weak.

Civilian protection has further altered the character of peacekeeping. Protection is now a central expectation of major UN operations, encompassing political engagement, physical protection and efforts to create a protective environment (Kilroy et al., 2024). The development is partly rooted in the failures of international intervention during the 1990s, particularly the inability to protect populations facing catastrophic violence. Contemporary evidence nevertheless shows that authorisation to protect civilians does not resolve the practical difficulties associated with doing so. Research covering UN military protection operations across ten African missions found that successful protection depended on the ability to tailor military action to the particular threat and, in many instances, to intervene before violence occurred (Kjeksrud, 2024). The effectiveness of civilian protection is also conditioned by relations with host governments. Duursma et al. (2024) demonstrate that the quality of host-state consent can significantly affect physical protection, human-rights activities, political dialogue and efforts to strengthen state protection capacity.

Peacekeeping also extends into the political institutions through which post-conflict competition is organised. Elections are especially important because they are expected to shift political rivalry from armed confrontation towards institutional competition. Yet elections conducted in fragile post-conflict environments can themselves become sites of renewed violence. Evidence from multidimensional peacekeeping operations in sub-Saharan Africa indicates that local UN military presence is associated with a lower risk of electoral violence, although this protective relationship is stronger against violence perpetrated by non-state actors than against government-affiliated actors (Fjelde & Smidt, 2022). Earlier research on peacekeeping election-education activities similarly demonstrates that international missions can influence electoral security through mechanisms extending beyond military deterrence, including public information and local engagement (Smidt, 2020). These findings are particularly important for evaluating missions in which electoral supervision and acceptance of electoral outcomes formed integral parts of the transition from war to political competition.

Despite these advances, important analytical problems remain. Much contemporary research isolates particular dimensions of peacekeeping effectiveness, including mandate implementation, civilian protection, electoral security, deployment capacity or conflict recurrence. Such disaggregation has generated valuable causal evidence, but it can obscure the interaction among the political and operational conditions through which missions succeed or fail. A mission may supervise elections effectively while disarmament remains incomplete; maintain a substantial

military presence while lacking a viable political settlement; possess a civilian-protection mandate while facing deteriorating host-state consent; or oversee a negotiated transition that collapses when a major belligerent rejects the political outcome. The interaction among these conditions is particularly important in Africa, where multidimensional peacekeeping developed through markedly different operational experiences.

This paper addresses that problem through a comparative examination of United Nations peace operations in Namibia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, Angola and Burundi. These cases provide contrasting experiences of political transition, peace-agreement implementation, electoral competition, disarmament, humanitarian intervention and international engagement. Rather than asking whether UN peacekeeping generally succeeds or fails, the analysis examines why operational outcomes differed across missions and what those differences reveal about the evolution of peacekeeping in Africa. Particular attention is directed towards political commitment to negotiated settlements, acceptance of electoral outcomes, management of spoilers, mandate credibility, disarmament, regional cooperation and the relationship between international intervention and domestic political processes.

The paper makes its contribution through this comparative integration. It argues that the evolution of UN peacekeeping in Africa should not be understood principally as a progression from smaller traditional missions towards increasingly expansive multidimensional mandates. The more consequential development concerns the changing relationship between political settlement and operational intervention. Peacekeeping has been most promising where international presence has reinforced an implementable political process and helped transfer competition from armed confrontation into institutional channels. Conversely, broader mandates and greater international involvement have proved insufficient where major actors retained military alternatives, political settlements collapsed, or operational responsibilities exceeded available authority and capability. Re-examining major African peace operations through this relational perspective provides a basis for identifying lessons that remain relevant to contemporary debates about mandate design, political strategy, civilian protection and the future direction of United Nations peacekeeping.

THE EVOLUTION OF UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING IN AFRICA

United Nations peacekeeping developed as a pragmatic response to the limitations of the collective security arrangements envisaged in the UN Charter. Although the Charter does not expressly define peacekeeping, its early practice rested on a relatively restrained model of international intervention. Military personnel were deployed principally to observe ceasefires, monitor agreements, separate opposing forces and create sufficient political space for negotiated settlements. Consent of the principal parties, impartiality and limited recourse to force became the central principles associated with this

traditional approach. These characteristics reflected an international system in which peacekeeping was primarily intended to contain interstate confrontation rather than reconstruct political authority within states (United Nations, 2008).

The end of the Cold War altered both the political possibilities for UN intervention and the character of conflicts to which peacekeepers were increasingly deployed. Internal armed conflicts assumed greater prominence on the international security agenda, while peacekeeping operations were required to function in environments marked by fragmented authority, weak institutions, displaced populations, armed factions and severe humanitarian crises. The traditional emphasis on monitoring agreements between identifiable belligerents consequently became insufficient. Peace operations acquired responsibilities extending into disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, electoral assistance, human rights, humanitarian coordination, security sector support and the restoration of political institutions. This transition marked the emergence of multidimensional peacekeeping as a substantially more ambitious form of international engagement (United Nations, 2008; de Coning, 2019).

Africa became particularly important to this transformation. The continent presented the UN with conflicts in which the boundaries between civil war, regional insecurity and humanitarian emergency were frequently difficult to separate. Peace operations in Namibia, Mozambique, Angola, Rwanda, Somalia and Burundi confronted markedly different political circumstances, yet collectively they exposed the inadequacy of treating peacekeeping simply as military interposition between organised combatants. The African experience increasingly required the UN to engage with political transition, electoral processes, humanitarian protection and the rebuilding of institutions alongside conventional security responsibilities. It also demonstrated that the effectiveness of peacekeeping depended heavily on conditions that could not be created through deployment alone.

The expansion of peacekeeping was accompanied by a corresponding enlargement of expectations. Contemporary missions have increasingly been expected to protect civilians while simultaneously supporting political settlements and maintaining relationships with host governments. Civilian protection became especially prominent as the consequences of intra-state warfare demonstrated that a ceasefire between armed actors could coexist with extreme insecurity among civilian populations. Empirical research provides considerable support for the protective potential of peacekeeping. Larger deployments of UN military and police personnel have been associated with reductions in civilian killings during civil wars, while subnational research indicates that the physical presence of peacekeepers can raise the political and military costs faced by armed groups contemplating attacks against civilians (Hultman et al., 2013; Fjelde et al., 2019). More recent causal evidence similarly suggests that peacekeeper

deployment can improve civilian protection in African civil conflicts (Carnegie & Mikulaschek, 2020).

The African record nevertheless cautions against equating a stronger mandate with an effective mission. The capacity to implement a mandate is shaped by the number, composition, quality and mobility of deployed personnel as well as the political environment within which they operate. Haass and Ansorg (2018), for example, found that troop quality matters independently of troop numbers because well-trained and appropriately equipped forces possess greater capacity to deter attacks, reach difficult locations and monitor agreements. Research examining the broader conflict-reducing effects of peacekeeping likewise indicates that adequately resourced missions with stronger mandates can reduce the onset, escalation, continuation and recurrence of armed conflict (Hegre et al., 2019). Peacekeeping effectiveness therefore cannot be understood solely through the formal language of Security Council resolutions. Mandates acquire practical meaning only when matched with credible operational capabilities and political support.

This expansion has also produced tensions within peacekeeping doctrine. Operations charged with civilian protection may be required to use force in environments where armed groups remain active, creating difficult questions concerning impartiality and the boundary between peacekeeping and peace enforcement. The distinction has particular relevance in Africa, where regional organisations have sometimes undertaken more coercive operations than those traditionally associated with UN peacekeeping. De Coning (2017) observes that the UN and African Union have developed different approaches to peace enforcement, even as their operational relationship has become increasingly important. The resulting division of responsibilities reflects both the growth of African peace operations capacity and the difficulty of applying traditional peacekeeping principles to conflicts in which there may be little peace to keep.

Protection mandates generate further dilemmas when ambitious responsibilities exceed the political and operational capacity of missions. Day and Hunt (2022) caution that protection of civilians can produce competing priorities and unintended consequences when missions are required to reconcile expansive protection expectations with political strategies, limited resources and complex relationships with host states. This problem is particularly significant because peacekeepers normally operate with host-state consent, even where state forces themselves may represent a threat to civilians. Fjelde et al. (2019) found that local peacekeeping presence was more effective in constraining violence by rebel groups than violence perpetrated by government forces. The finding exposes an enduring structural difficulty: peacekeeping may be expected to protect civilians while remaining dependent upon political cooperation from the state in which the mission is deployed.

Operational effectiveness also extends beyond the question of whether violence declines during deployment.

Peacekeeping is intended to create conditions in which political settlements can survive after international forces withdraw. Research on post-conflict peace indicates that UN operations can influence not merely the immediate intensity of violence but also the durability of peace. Hultman et al. (2016) found that peacekeeping deployments can extend the duration of post-civil conflict peace, while Hegre et al. (2019) demonstrated that the benefits of intervention operate through several pathways, including reduced conflict intensity and recurrence. These findings reinforce an important lesson from African operations: the value of peacekeeping cannot be judged exclusively through short-term battlefield outcomes.

Another major development has been the increasing importance of institutional cooperation between the UN and African actors. The growth of African peace operations has created a security architecture in which responsibilities are increasingly distributed across international and regional institutions. African organisations may possess political proximity, regional knowledge and a greater willingness to undertake enforcement-oriented tasks, whereas the UN retains distinctive advantages in international legitimacy, financing and multidimensional mission support. This relationship has made institutional partnership an increasingly important feature of peace operations on the continent (de Coning, 2017, 2019). It also confirms that the evolution of peacekeeping in Africa cannot be understood solely as a history of UN organisational adaptation. It has increasingly become a history of interaction between global and regional approaches to conflict management.

The trajectory of UN peacekeeping in Africa therefore reveals an expanding conception of what international intervention is expected to accomplish. Ceasefire monitoring and military observation remain important, but they now sit alongside civilian protection, political facilitation, electoral support, institutional recovery and longer-term peacebuilding. Evidence that peacekeeping can reduce violence and prolong peace is substantial, yet African experience also shows that effectiveness remains conditional upon credible political settlements, adequate capabilities, appropriate mandates and sustained cooperation among international, regional and domestic actors. The transition from traditional to multidimensional peacekeeping should consequently be understood not simply as mandate expansion, but as an institutional response to the changing political and security conditions under which peace operations have been required to function.

OPERATIONAL EXPERIENCE FROM MAJOR UNITED NATIONS PEACE OPERATIONS IN AFRICA

The development of United Nations peacekeeping in Africa is best understood through the operational experience of individual missions. Namibia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, Angola and Burundi present markedly different outcomes, despite sharing the broad objective of helping societies move from armed conflict towards political settlement. Their comparison is particularly instructive

because the missions confronted different levels of domestic consent, institutional collapse, external involvement and commitment to negotiated agreements. The cases also demonstrate that peacekeeping outcomes have rarely depended upon the presence of UN personnel alone. Political conditions surrounding deployment have been equally important.

Namibia: UNTAG and the Consolidation of Political Transition

The United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia remains one of the clearest examples of successful multidimensional peacekeeping in Africa. Deployed in 1989, UNTAG was responsible for supporting the implementation of Security Council Resolution 435 and assisting Namibia's transition to independence. Its responsibilities extended considerably beyond conventional ceasefire observation. The mission monitored the cessation of hostilities, supervised the withdrawal of South African forces, monitored local policing, assisted the return of refugees and political exiles, and created conditions for free and fair elections (Howard, 2002, 2014).

UNTAG's significance lies partly in the breadth of these responsibilities. Political transition, electoral supervision, civilian policing and military monitoring were brought within a single international operation. This represented an important departure from earlier forms of peacekeeping in which military observation predominated. Howard (2002) attributes the mission's success not simply to favourable international circumstances but also to its ability to adapt operationally when difficulties emerged during implementation. Such adaptability was particularly important during the turbulent opening phase of the mission.

The success narrative should nevertheless be treated critically. Recent research examining competing memories of Namibia's transition shows that UN diplomatic accounts have tended to emphasise UNTAG's achievements and international cooperation, whereas accounts associated with the liberation struggle have attached greater importance to events preceding deployment and have identified shortcomings during the implementation process (Garcia & Flaspöler, 2026). The case therefore demonstrates that mission success can be credible without implying flawless implementation. What remains difficult to dispute is that UNTAG completed its principal mandate and contributed to the institutional conditions within which Namibia achieved independence and conducted internationally recognised elections.

Mozambique: ONUMOZ and the Implementation of a Negotiated Peace

Mozambique provides another important case of comparatively successful UN engagement. The United Nations Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ) was established in December 1992 following the General Peace Agreement between the Government of Mozambique and the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO). Its

responsibilities included monitoring the ceasefire, supporting demobilisation and disarmament, facilitating humanitarian assistance and refugee return, and assisting the electoral process (Berdal, 2014).

The mission confronted a society emerging from prolonged warfare and a peace settlement whose implementation depended heavily upon continuing cooperation between former adversaries. ONUMOZ nevertheless developed a coordinating role that extended across military, political, humanitarian and electoral activities. This breadth was important because implementation of the peace agreement could not be reduced to a ceasefire. Combatants needed to be demobilised, displaced populations required assistance, and political competition had to be transferred from military confrontation to electoral institutions.

The Mozambican experience is particularly relevant to understanding consent as a political process rather than a fixed condition present at the moment of deployment. Howard (2007) argues that ONUMOZ's success cannot adequately be explained by assuming that the belligerents entered the process already committed to every aspect of the settlement. Consent had to be sustained and, at important points, cultivated during implementation. ONUMOZ therefore illustrates the importance of political engagement alongside military monitoring. The eventual conduct of elections in 1994 and the acceptance of the political process provided a markedly different outcome from cases in which defeated or dissatisfied parties returned to armed confrontation.

Rwanda: UNAMIR and the Consequences of an Inadequate Mission

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) presents one of the most consequential failures in the history of UN peacekeeping. Established in 1993 to assist implementation of the Arusha Peace Agreement, UNAMIR entered an environment in which political polarisation, organised extremist violence and resistance to the peace process were already severe. The mission was expected to contribute to security in Kigali, monitor implementation of the agreement and support the transitional arrangements envisaged under the Arusha framework.

The genocide of 1994 exposed the profound disparity between UNAMIR's responsibilities and its practical ability to respond to rapidly escalating violence. Analysis of the mission has consequently focused on restrictive rules of engagement, inadequate force structure, limited resources and weak international political commitment. Drew and Beardsley (2018) show that UNAMIR's rules of engagement and force configuration substantially restricted its capacity to respond to genocidal violence. The problem was therefore not merely one of tactical failure after mass killing began. Fundamental weaknesses were embedded in the design and authorisation of the operation.

Rwanda demonstrates the danger of deploying a peacekeeping mission on assumptions that no longer

correspond to political realities on the ground. A force designed primarily to assist implementation of a negotiated agreement was confronted with actors prepared to destroy that agreement through organised violence. The mission lacked the capabilities and political backing required for such a transformation in circumstances. Its experience consequently became a defining reference point in later debates about civilian protection, mandate credibility and the international responsibility to respond when mass atrocities occur.

Somalia: From Humanitarian Protection to Coercive Intervention

Somalia exposed a different set of limitations. The collapse of central authority and the humanitarian emergency of the early 1990s created an operational setting in which there was no functioning national government capable of acting as a conventional partner in peace implementation. The United Nations Operation in Somalia I (UNOSOM I), authorised in 1992, was initially intended to facilitate humanitarian assistance and monitor a ceasefire. Continuing insecurity and the obstruction of relief operations subsequently contributed to the deployment of the United States-led Unified Task Force, followed by the substantially more ambitious UNOSOM II (Williams, 2014a, 2014b).

UNOSOM II was expected to go beyond humanitarian protection and contribute to disarmament, political reconciliation and the reconstruction of Somali institutions. The widening mandate produced serious operational and political consequences. The mission increasingly moved from consent-based peacekeeping towards coercive military action against particular Somali factions. Williams (2014b) identifies this war-fighting posture as a central feature of UNOSOM II's difficulties. Earlier analysis similarly showed how movement between peacekeeping and peace enforcement created operational risks that had not been adequately recognised (Farrell, 1995).

The Somali experience demonstrates the difficulty of maintaining impartiality once a peace operation becomes directly engaged in coercive confrontation with one of the principal armed actors. Humanitarian access was improved during important phases of the international intervention, but the broader objective of establishing sustainable political stability was not achieved. Somalia therefore revealed the limits of military capability where an agreed political settlement was absent and where coercion began to substitute for a viable peace process.

Angola: UNAVEM and the Problem of Incomplete Commitment

Angola offers a further example of the limitations imposed upon peacekeeping when parties retain military alternatives to negotiated settlement. UN engagement developed through successive operations. The United Nations Angola Verification Mission I (UNAVEM I) was established to verify the withdrawal of Cuban troops. UNAVEM II subsequently monitored implementation of the

peace arrangements between the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) and the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA), while UNAVEM III was deployed following the 1994 Lusaka Protocol.

The critical difficulty arose when electoral competition failed to replace military contestation. UNITA's rejection of the 1992 electoral outcome contributed to renewed warfare and exposed the fragility of a peace process in which an important armed actor remained unwilling to accept an unfavourable political result. Dzinesa (2004) contrasts this experience directly with Namibia, concluding that successive UN operations in Angola failed to establish a durable framework for peace while UNTAG successfully implemented its mandate. MacQueen (1998) similarly characterises UN involvement in Angola as a prolonged and difficult process in which apparent progress repeatedly remained vulnerable to renewed confrontation.

Angola therefore illustrates a fundamental limitation of externally supported peace implementation. Peacekeepers may verify agreements, monitor demobilisation and support elections, but they cannot readily transform electoral institutions into legitimate mechanisms of political competition when powerful actors continue to regard armed force as an acceptable alternative. The experience stands in sharp contrast to Namibia and Mozambique, where political settlements eventually provided a workable basis for moving competition away from the battlefield.

Burundi: Peacekeeping within an Extended Political Settlement

Burundi represents a somewhat different trajectory. Following years of civil conflict and political instability, the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement of 2000 established an important framework for political transition. Regional involvement preceded the full UN operation, with the African Mission in Burundi providing an initial peacekeeping presence before the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB) was established under Security Council Resolution 1545 in 2004.

ONUB was mandated to support implementation of ceasefire arrangements, contribute to disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, promote security, assist political transition and support the organisation of elections (Boutellis, 2014). The mission therefore reflected the multidimensional character that had become increasingly prominent in African peacekeeping. Security responsibilities were integrated with political and institutional tasks intended to help move Burundi from transitional arrangements towards an elected government.

The transition achieved important milestones, including constitutional reform and elections in 2005, yet the peace process remained incomplete because not all armed actors were incorporated at the same time. This qualification matters when assessing ONUB. The operation contributed to an important stage of Burundi's transition, but it operated within a longer political process involving

domestic actors, regional mediation, the African Union and subsequent UN engagement. ONUB completed its mandate at the end of 2006 and was succeeded by the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi (United Nations, 2006).

Contrasting Operational Experiences

Comparison of the six operations reveals a clear divide between missions deployed where political agreements could progressively structure post-conflict competition and missions operating where major actors continued to pursue political objectives through armed force. Namibia and Mozambique demonstrate the possibilities created when ceasefire implementation, demobilisation, electoral processes and political transition become mutually reinforcing. Rwanda shows the catastrophic consequences that can follow when mission design and resources are inadequate for a rapidly deteriorating security environment. Somalia demonstrates the dangers associated with moving from humanitarian peacekeeping towards coercive enforcement without a sufficiently viable political settlement. Angola shows how elections cannot consolidate peace when major actors remain unwilling to accept political defeat, while Burundi demonstrates the importance of linking peacekeeping to an extended process of negotiated political transition.

The African experience therefore resists explanations based solely on mission size or formal mandate. Peacekeeping proved most effective where international engagement was supported by an implementable political framework, sustained mediation and sufficient acceptance of political rules among the principal parties. Where these conditions were absent, even ambitious international intervention encountered severe limitations. The central lesson is not that particular peacekeeping instruments invariably succeed or fail, but that their effectiveness depends heavily upon the political environment in which those instruments are employed.

COMPARATIVE LESSONS FROM AFRICAN PEACE OPERATIONS

The contrasting experiences of Namibia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, Angola and Burundi suggest that the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping cannot be attributed to any single operational characteristic. Successful missions have depended upon combinations of political consent, credible agreements, adequate operational capacity and sustained cooperation among domestic and international actors. Conversely, missions have struggled when peacekeepers were deployed into environments in which belligerents continued to regard armed confrontation as preferable to political compromise. Recent comparative evidence supports this interpretation. Across 32 UN military peacekeeping operations in civil wars, Pushkina et al. (2022) found domestic consent and cooperation to be the most consistently important condition associated with mission outcomes. Their analysis also identified the absence of external support for belligerents as a recurrent condition in pathways towards successful peacekeeping. These findings provide a useful

basis for interpreting the different African experiences considered here.

Consent and Political Commitment Cannot Be Treated as Formalities

The first lesson concerns the distinction between formal consent to a peacekeeping deployment and genuine commitment to the political process that the mission is intended to support. Namibia and Mozambique demonstrate the advantages available when former adversaries are prepared, despite continuing disagreements, to operate within a negotiated political framework. Angola illustrates the opposite problem. Acceptance of peace arrangements proved insufficient when an important belligerent remained prepared to return to armed confrontation following an unfavourable electoral outcome. Rwanda similarly demonstrated the weakness of formal agreements where powerful political actors were actively undermining the settlement.

Consent should therefore be understood as an evolving political relationship rather than a one-off authorisation for deployment. Yuen (2020) shows that the nature of consent negotiated by belligerents can provide important information about the fragility of a ceasefire and the prospects for subsequent peace. More recent evidence indicates that the quality of host-state consent can directly affect the ability of peacekeepers to implement mandated activities, including civilian protection, human rights monitoring and political dialogue (Duursma et al., 2023). A mission may consequently possess legal authorisation and formal host-state approval while encountering persistent obstruction in practice.

This distinction helps explain why peacekeeping has produced different results even when missions have operated under Security Council mandates and ostensibly consensual peace arrangements. Effective consent involves more than permitting peacekeepers to enter national territory. It requires sufficient acceptance of the mission's mandate and continued commitment to the political process around which the intervention has been constructed. The experience of African operations therefore suggests that consent must be continually assessed rather than presumed to remain intact throughout a mission.

A Peace Agreement Must Be Politically Implementable

A second lesson concerns the quality and implementation of peace agreements. Peacekeeping is considerably more difficult where no viable political settlement exists. International forces can monitor commitments, facilitate negotiations and provide security guarantees, but they cannot readily compensate for the absence of a political bargain that principal belligerents are prepared to implement.

The difference is evident across the six cases. Namibia and Mozambique possessed negotiated frameworks through which military confrontation could gradually be transferred into political competition. In Angola, the peace process remained vulnerable because acceptance of the electoral

route was not sufficiently entrenched to prevent renewed warfare. Somalia presented an even more difficult environment because fragmented political authority and continuing factional competition deprived the intervention of a sufficiently robust national settlement around which peacekeeping could be organised. Rwanda demonstrated how quickly a peace agreement could become operationally irrelevant when actors committed to violent alternatives retained the capacity to derail implementation.

This relationship between political process and peacekeeping performance has received strong support in more recent comparative research. Pushkina et al. (2022) show that mission success results from configurations of conditions rather than isolated variables, with domestic cooperation and the existence of workable political arrangements occupying important positions within those configurations. Peacekeeping should therefore reinforce a political settlement rather than become a substitute for one.

Mandates Require Capabilities That Match Conditions on the Ground

A third lesson concerns the relationship between mandates and operational capability. The mere existence of an ambitious Security Council mandate provides little assurance that its objectives can be achieved. Rwanda exposed this problem with particular severity. UNAMIR confronted circumstances dramatically more dangerous than those envisaged when the mission was established, while its personnel and authority remained inadequate for the scale of violence that developed. Somalia demonstrated a different form of mandate difficulty, as international engagement moved from humanitarian assistance towards increasingly coercive military objectives.

Mandate credibility depends upon the practical capacity to perform assigned responsibilities. Contemporary peacekeeping research reinforces this conclusion. Pushkina et al. (2022) identify appropriate resources and the absence of serious operational problems among the conditions relevant to successful mission configurations. The implication is important: mandates should reflect realistic assessments of conflict dynamics, available capabilities and the willingness of international actors to sustain the operation.

An expansive mandate without corresponding political and material support may create expectations that a mission cannot satisfy. Such discrepancies can damage local confidence and expose peacekeepers to accusations of ineffectiveness even where the underlying difficulty lies in the gap between authorised objectives and available means. Effective mandate design therefore requires prioritisation as much as ambition.

Disarmament Is Political as Well as Technical

Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) represent another recurring lesson from African peace operations. The experience of Namibia and Mozambique indicates that demobilisation can contribute significantly to political transition when former combatants accept

movement away from military competition. Angola demonstrates the converse. Where an armed organisation remains unwilling to relinquish its military capability, incomplete disarmament can preserve the organisational foundations for renewed conflict.

DDR should consequently not be understood simply as the collection of weapons or administrative processing of combatants. It involves changing the relationship between armed organisations, political authority and civilian society. Ayissi (2021), reviewing three decades of DDR experience in Africa, identifies reintegration as a particularly persistent weakness, noting that disarmament and demobilisation do not necessarily produce sustainable civilian reintegration. Bigombe (2021) similarly stresses the social dimensions of DDR and the importance of connecting ex-combatant reintegration to wider post-conflict reconstruction.

External involvement can complicate this process further. Mumford (2021) argues that conflicts involving extensive external support create particular DDR problems because relationships between external sponsors and domestic armed actors can survive beyond formal peace settlements. This has direct relevance to African peace operations in which neighbouring states or other external actors have supported belligerents. Removing weapons without addressing the political and external relationships that sustain armed organisations is unlikely to produce durable demilitarisation.

Elections Consolidate Peace Only When Political Actors Accept Electoral Competition

Elections have frequently occupied a central place in multidimensional peacekeeping, but the six cases show why elections should not automatically be equated with successful democratisation or conflict resolution. Namibia and Mozambique demonstrate how internationally supported elections can help institutionalise a negotiated transition when competing actors are prepared to accept electoral rules and results. Angola demonstrates the potentially destabilising consequences when electoral defeat is rejected and armed alternatives remain available.

The relevant lesson is therefore not simply that peacekeeping missions should organise or monitor elections. Electoral processes must be embedded within a political settlement sufficiently strong to ensure that losing an election is preferable to returning to war. Recent quantitative evidence reinforces the importance of the activities undertaken around elections. Smidt (2021), analysing 630 elections in conflict-affected countries, found that UN peacekeeping operations were better able to reduce election-related violence when they actively supported the organisation and security of elections. Peacekeeping involvement can therefore improve electoral security, but elections remain embedded in wider political relationships that determine whether their results become legitimate mechanisms for allocating political power.

Spoilers Must Be Addressed within the Political Strategy

A further lesson concerns actors who retain the capacity and incentive to obstruct implementation. The experiences of Angola, Rwanda and Somalia demonstrate different manifestations of this problem. Armed actors may reject electoral outcomes, undermine negotiated settlements, resist disarmament or obstruct humanitarian and political activities. Where such behaviour is not addressed effectively, the peace process can remain hostage to groups capable of imposing substantial costs through renewed violence.

The difficulty lies in determining how peacekeepers should respond. Excessive accommodation can allow armed actors to undermine agreements without consequence, whereas premature coercion can compromise impartiality and transform peacekeepers into active parties to the conflict. Somalia demonstrated the dangers of the latter trajectory. Once international forces became engaged in direct confrontation with particular armed actors, the distinction between peacekeeping and enforcement became increasingly difficult to sustain.

The appropriate response therefore depends upon a broader political strategy. Military pressure may sometimes be necessary, but it cannot replace mediation, incentives, political inclusion and credible consequences for non-compliance. Peacekeeping is most likely to constrain obstruction when coercive capacity supports, rather than displaces, a viable political process.

External Support for Belligerents Can Undermine Peacekeeping from Beyond the Mission Area

African conflicts have frequently been influenced by neighbouring states and external sponsors. Peacekeeping effectiveness can consequently be undermined even where a mission performs competently within the host country. Continued flows of weapons, finance, fighters or political support can enable belligerents to resist disarmament and reduce the costs of abandoning peace agreements.

This proposition receives particularly strong support from recent comparative research. Pushkina et al. (2022) found the absence of external belligerent support in every identified pathway towards successful UN military peacekeeping in civil wars. The finding suggests that external sponsorship should not be treated as a peripheral diplomatic concern. It can alter the strategic calculations of domestic belligerents by making continued warfare materially and politically viable.

Mumford (2021) reaches a related conclusion in examining post-conflict DDR following proxy wars. External support creates relationships that may persist into the implementation phase and complicate efforts to dismantle armed organisations. Peacekeeping strategies in regionalised conflicts therefore require diplomacy beyond the territorial boundaries of the host state. Regional political engagement, restrictions on external military assistance and cooperation among neighbouring governments may be as important as activities undertaken by peacekeepers within the mission area.

Regional Cooperation Is a Strategic Requirement

The Burundi experience illustrates the importance of regional engagement particularly clearly. African-led intervention preceded ONUB, while the wider peace process depended substantially upon regional mediation and political involvement. The case demonstrates that the UN does not necessarily enter a conflict as the first or sole international actor. Peacekeeping may instead form one stage within a longer sequence of regional and international conflict-management initiatives.

Regional cooperation can provide political access and contextual knowledge that complement the UN's international legitimacy and operational capacity. Its importance becomes greater where conflicts cross borders through refugee movements, armed-group activity, resource networks or external sponsorship. A peacekeeping mission confined politically to the host state may struggle to address drivers of conflict sustained through regional relationships.

The comparative evidence therefore supports a model of peacekeeping in which regional diplomacy and international deployment are mutually reinforcing. Such cooperation should not be understood merely as burden-sharing. It can help align the incentives of neighbouring states with the objectives of the peace process and reduce opportunities for armed actors to secure external support.

Peacekeeping Success Is Best Understood as a Configuration of Conditions

The most important comparative lesson is that no single institutional reform, mandate provision or operational technique can explain peacekeeping success. Namibia and Mozambique did not succeed merely because elections were conducted, just as Rwanda did not fail simply because its mission was comparatively small. The relevant conditions interacted. Political cooperation facilitated implementation; implementation supported disarmament; disarmament reduced the viability of renewed warfare; credible elections provided an alternative mechanism for political competition; and international and regional support helped sustain the process.

Recent comparative research provides particularly strong support for this configurational interpretation. Pushkina et al. (2022) reject a single-factor explanation of peacekeeping performance and show that different combinations of political and operational conditions can produce successful outcomes. Domestic consent and cooperation emerge as especially important, while the absence of external belligerent support is common across successful configurations. Research on consent similarly shows that peacekeeping effectiveness depends upon the continuing relationship between missions and political actors rather than the mere presence of international personnel (Duursma et al., 2023; Yuen, 2020).

The six African experiences consequently suggest that peacekeeping works most effectively when military, political and institutional instruments reinforce one

another. Adequate troops cannot compensate indefinitely for a collapsing political process. Elections cannot consolidate peace where armed actors refuse political defeat. DDR cannot succeed where combatants retain external sponsors and credible military alternatives. Regional diplomacy cannot substitute for operational capacity on the ground. Conversely, where these elements become mutually supportive, peacekeeping can provide the security, mediation and institutional assistance necessary for a negotiated settlement to develop into a more durable political order.

This conclusion shifts attention away from the recurrent question of whether UN peacekeeping simply “works” or “fails”. A more useful question concerns the political and operational conditions under which particular peacekeeping instruments become effective. The African cases demonstrate that international intervention is most productive when it strengthens an existing movement towards negotiated politics while reducing the incentives and opportunities for belligerents to return to armed conflict. That principle provides the foundation for considering what these historical experiences imply for contemporary United Nations peacekeeping.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING

The experience accumulated across African peace operations has implications that extend well beyond the historical circumstances of individual missions. Contemporary peacekeeping operates in an environment in which armed groups are frequently fragmented, host governments may provide only conditional cooperation, civilian protection expectations are high, and peacekeepers may be deployed without a comprehensive political settlement capable of sustaining their intervention. These conditions make it increasingly difficult to assume that principles and instruments developed for earlier generations of peacekeeping can simply be extended to contemporary conflicts. The lessons from Namibia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, Angola and Burundi instead point towards a model in which political strategy, operational capability and domestic legitimacy must be considered together.

Political Consent as a Continuing Requirement

One implication concerns the treatment of consent. Consent is commonly regarded as a foundational principle of UN peacekeeping, yet African experience demonstrates that it should not be understood as a one-off authorisation secured before deployment. Relationships between missions and host governments can deteriorate considerably as political interests change, particularly when peacekeepers undertake politically sensitive responsibilities involving human rights, civilian protection, electoral processes or security-sector accountability.

Recent research confirms that the quality of host-state consent directly affects mission implementation. Duursma et al. (2023) found that host-state consent influences

several dimensions of civilian protection, including physical protection, human-rights reporting, dialogue and support for state capacity. The implication is important. A technically capable mission can become progressively less effective when political cooperation deteriorates, even if its formal Security Council mandate remains unchanged. Consent should therefore be treated as a continuing political relationship requiring active management throughout the mission rather than as a legal condition satisfied at the point of deployment.

This does not imply that peacekeeping should become subordinate to the preferences of host governments. Such an approach would be particularly problematic where government actors themselves contribute to civilian insecurity or resist implementation of agreed political reforms. It does suggest, however, that mandate design should account more realistically for the political cooperation required for implementation. Where this cooperation is absent, the Security Council must confront the resulting contradiction rather than repeatedly expanding responsibilities that a mission has diminishing practical capacity to perform.

Mandate Ambition and Operational Capability

A second implication concerns the relationship between mandates and resources. The historical cases demonstrate the dangers associated with assigning extensive responsibilities without ensuring that missions possess the political backing and operational capabilities necessary to fulfil them. Rwanda remains the starkest illustration, but the problem has persisted as peacekeeping mandates have expanded.

Contemporary operations are commonly expected to protect civilians, support political processes, facilitate humanitarian activity, monitor human rights, strengthen institutions and contribute to security-sector reform. Such responsibilities can create a substantial gap between formal expectations and operational capacity. Karlsrud (2023) identifies a wider movement towards more pragmatic forms of peacekeeping, including greater reliance on support missions, regional forces and parallel security arrangements. This changing environment strengthens the case for mandate prioritisation rather than continuous mandate expansion.

Mandate credibility should therefore be assessed in practical rather than rhetorical terms. Responsibilities should correspond to achievable political objectives, available capabilities and conditions within the host state. Where civilian protection constitutes a core responsibility, sufficient mobility, intelligence, logistical capacity and appropriately prepared personnel are essential. Where political transition is the principal objective, diplomatic engagement and institutional support cannot be treated as secondary additions to military deployment. The lesson is not that mandates should necessarily be narrower, but that their scope should reflect a defensible relationship between objectives and means.

Civilian Protection, Robustness and Legitimacy

Civilian protection has become central to contemporary peacekeeping, but African experience indicates that stronger authorisation to use force does not automatically produce greater protection. The relevant question is not simply whether peacekeepers possess authority to use force, but whether force can be used effectively, proportionately and in ways that retain the confidence of populations whom the mission is intended to protect.

Recent evidence strengthens this concern. Gippert (2025) demonstrates that local assessments of peacekeepers' use of force are shaped both by whether protection is delivered and by the manner in which force is exercised. Responsiveness, proportionality and impartiality affect how communities judge the legitimacy of peacekeeping action. Gelot and Khadka (2026), drawing on evidence from South Sudan and Somalia, similarly show that local evaluations of military peacekeeping activities are closely connected to expectations concerning protection and appropriate uses of force.

These findings have important implications for the robust turn in peacekeeping. More force is not necessarily synonymous with more effective peacekeeping. Excessive coercion can compromise legitimacy, while insufficient action in the face of foreseeable civilian harm can produce an equally damaging loss of confidence. The challenge is therefore one of calibrated protection. Military action should remain connected to a coherent political strategy and informed by the security priorities of affected populations. Civilian protection is weakened when local communities perceive a mission as unable, unwilling or selectively prepared to respond to threats.

Local Engagement as an Operational Requirement

A related implication concerns the place of local populations within mission planning. Peacekeeping effectiveness has traditionally been evaluated through high-level indicators such as ceasefire compliance, elections, territorial stability and completion of mandated tasks. These measures remain important, but they do not necessarily reveal whether communities experiencing insecurity regard the mission as legitimate or responsive.

Local engagement should consequently be treated as part of operational effectiveness rather than simply as a communication strategy. Kotajoki (2025) argues that the effectiveness of UN interventions depends partly on peacekeepers' ability to engage with local actors, while also demonstrating that peacekeepers themselves may hold simplified understandings of the populations with whom they interact. This matters because security priorities identified at mission headquarters may differ substantially from those experienced within conflict-affected communities.

Greater local engagement can improve information, strengthen early warning and provide missions with a more accurate understanding of how their activities are

perceived. It can also help identify discrepancies between formally reported progress and lived insecurity. This is particularly important in geographically dispersed conflicts where national political agreements coexist with continuing violence at subnational level. Peacekeeping should therefore incorporate meaningful community engagement into protection planning, political analysis and assessments of mission performance.

Strengthening United Nations and African Union Cooperation

The comparative African experience also supports deeper institutional cooperation between the United Nations and African regional organisations. Regional involvement was important in several of the peace processes considered earlier, particularly where neighbouring states and regional institutions possessed political influence that the UN alone could not readily reproduce. Contemporary African peace operations increasingly reflect this interdependence.

The UN-AU relationship has consequently become one of the most institutionalised partnerships in contemporary peace operations. Yet institutional cooperation does not remove differences in political interests, organisational priorities or approaches to intervention. Jung (2025) shows that the partnership contains continuing legitimisation struggles alongside complementarity, indicating that cooperation should not be assumed merely because both organisations share an interest in African peace and security.

Recent institutional developments nevertheless provide an important basis for strengthening this relationship. The UN Secretary-General's report on UN-AU cooperation identifies conflict prevention, mediation, peacekeeping and peacebuilding as areas of continuing partnership (United Nations Secretary-General, 2024). More predictable arrangements for supporting African-led peace operations can potentially allow regional political access and operational responsiveness to be combined with the UN's broader institutional resources and international authority. Effective partnership, however, requires clear responsibilities, common political objectives and accountability mechanisms rather than an improvised transfer of security responsibilities from one institution to another.

Planning for Transition from the Beginning

The African cases further demonstrate that the completion of a peacekeeping mandate should not be equated automatically with the consolidation of peace. Elections, disarmament programmes and the restoration of formal political institutions can represent important milestones without eliminating the underlying risks of renewed conflict. Mission withdrawal should therefore form part of peacekeeping strategy from the beginning of deployment rather than being treated primarily as an administrative exercise undertaken once international pressure for departure intensifies.

Research on peacekeeping withdrawal reinforces this concern. Kissling and Smidt (2023), analysing African countries hosting UN peacekeeping operations, found that local troop reductions could be followed by short-term increases in broader political violence even though they did not find corresponding increases in election-specific violence. Their findings indicate that reductions in international security presence may create temporary vulnerabilities that require careful management. Aloyo and Swenson (2023) similarly argue that decisions concerning peacekeeping departure should take account of effectiveness and legitimacy as well as the continuing justification for international presence.

Transition planning should consequently focus on whether domestic institutions can sustain essential political and security functions after withdrawal. Electoral completion alone is an insufficient criterion. The capacity of national institutions to manage political competition, protect civilians and prevent renewed armed mobilisation is equally important. Where these conditions remain fragile, abrupt withdrawal can place earlier peacebuilding gains at risk.

Towards Politically Grounded and Context-Sensitive Peacekeeping

The implications arising from African peace operations ultimately converge on the need for a more politically grounded conception of peacekeeping. Successful operations cannot be designed through military capacity, institutional templates or expansive Security Council mandates alone. Political settlements remain central, but their existence must not be mistaken for evidence that the parties have abandoned coercive alternatives. Consent remains essential, but it must be maintained rather than presumed. Civilian protection requires credible force, but force must remain proportionate, responsive and politically purposeful. Regional partnership can expand institutional capacity, but only where responsibilities and political objectives are sufficiently aligned.

Contemporary peacekeeping in Africa should therefore be judged less by the breadth of activities incorporated into a mandate than by the coherence connecting political objectives, operational means and conditions within the host society. This approach does not diminish the importance of multidimensional peacekeeping. It makes its requirements more demanding. Missions should possess clear political priorities, realistic mandates, adequate capabilities, meaningful engagement with affected communities and transition arrangements capable of preserving gains after withdrawal. The historical variation between relatively successful transitions and severe operational failures across Africa suggests that these conditions are not peripheral considerations. They are central to whether international presence can contribute to a peace that survives beyond the mission itself.

CONCLUSION

The evolution of United Nations peacekeeping in Africa demonstrates both the adaptability of international peace operations and the persistent limitations surrounding their implementation. What began largely as a mechanism for monitoring ceasefires and separating opposing forces developed into a multidimensional form of intervention concerned with political transition, civilian protection, disarmament, electoral processes, institutional recovery and post-conflict peacebuilding. African peace operations have been central to this transformation. They have also provided some of the clearest evidence that expanding the responsibilities of peacekeepers does not, in itself, increase the likelihood of sustainable peace.

The comparative experiences of Namibia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, Angola and Burundi reveal considerable variation in the outcomes of international intervention. Namibia and Mozambique demonstrate the possibilities available when peacekeeping supports an implementable political settlement and the principal actors progressively transfer political competition from armed confrontation to institutional processes. Rwanda represents the gravest consequences of deploying a mission whose mandate, capabilities and international political support proved inadequate for a rapidly deteriorating security environment. Somalia illustrates the difficulties that arise when peacekeeping moves towards coercive enforcement in the absence of a sufficiently viable political settlement. Angola demonstrates the vulnerability of peace implementation when a major belligerent remains prepared to reject electoral outcomes and return to warfare. Burundi, meanwhile, shows how peacekeeping can contribute meaningfully to political transition while remaining only one component of a longer process involving domestic negotiation, regional mediation and continuing international engagement.

Three broader conclusions follow from these experiences. First, peacekeeping is most effective when it reinforces a credible political process rather than attempting to substitute for one. The deployment of international personnel cannot compensate indefinitely for the absence of political commitment among the principal parties. Consent is therefore important not simply as a condition for initial deployment but as a continuing relationship that must survive the implementation of ceasefires, disarmament arrangements, elections and political reforms.

Second, mandate credibility depends upon the relationship between assigned responsibilities and the capabilities available to fulfil them. The African experience demonstrates the dangers of creating ambitious expectations without corresponding political authority, personnel, mobility, logistical support and international commitment. This consideration is especially important for civilian protection. A mandate that promises protection but cannot respond effectively to serious threats risks damaging both mission legitimacy and confidence in the wider peace process. Conversely, increasingly robust military action cannot provide a durable substitute for political engagement.

Third, sustainable peace requires attention to what remains after the peacekeeping mission withdraws. Elections, demobilisation programmes and transitional institutions may represent important achievements, but their completion does not necessarily mean that the causes or structures of violent conflict have disappeared. Effective peacekeeping should therefore be connected from the outset to longer-term institutional capacity, legitimate political competition and arrangements capable of managing disputes without renewed armed mobilisation. Exit planning is consequently part of peacebuilding rather than merely the final administrative stage of a mission.

These conclusions also reinforce the importance of cooperation between the United Nations and African regional institutions. Contemporary conflicts frequently cross national boundaries and involve political and security relationships that cannot be addressed effectively through a single international organisation. Regional actors may contribute political access, contextual understanding and operational responsiveness, while the United Nations provides international legitimacy, multidimensional capabilities and broader institutional support. The effectiveness of such partnerships nevertheless depends upon coherent political objectives, clearly defined responsibilities and adequate accountability.

The central lesson from major United Nations peace operations in Africa is therefore neither that peacekeeping succeeds nor that it fails as a general instrument of conflict management. Its effectiveness is conditional. Political commitment, credible mandates, adequate operational capacity, management of spoilers, regional cooperation, civilian legitimacy and viable post-conflict institutions interact to determine what a mission can realistically accomplish. The most successful operations have been those in which these conditions have reinforced one another sufficiently to allow political processes to replace armed competition. Where they have been absent, international presence has struggled to transform temporary reductions in violence into durable peace.

Future United Nations peacekeeping in Africa should consequently resist the assumption that increasingly complex conflicts require continually expanding mandates. A more credible approach would place political strategy at the centre of mission design and ensure that responsibilities are matched with realistic capabilities and clearly prioritised objectives. Peacekeeping remains an important instrument of international conflict management, but it contributes most when it helps create and protect the political space within which domestic actors can build institutions capable of sustaining peace after international forces have departed.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

All authors played a substantive role in shaping this study and developing the manuscript. C.E.E. conceptualised the work and designed the overall study framework. Data analysis, interpretation of data and validation of findings were carried out collaboratively, with each author

contributing to the discussions that informed the final results. E.E.E. and K.O.O. prepared the initial manuscript draft, covering the introduction, methods, results and discussion. Co-authors strengthened the analysis, offered detailed revisions and enhanced the clarity and coherence of the final document. Every author reviewed the complete manuscript, approved the final version and accepted responsibility for the integrity of the work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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