UN Peacekeeping and Impartiality: A Fading Relationship

John Karlsrud

United Nations Peacekeeping has for decades been a keystone in the framework to uphold international peace and security. But over the last decade, no new large multidimensional missions—that include a mix of civilian, military, and police components—have been deployed, and existing multidimensional peacekeeping missions have been closed in rapid succession. UN missions have been under dual pressure from a UN Security Council (UNSC) marked by increased geopolitical competition and little willingness to mandate new large-scale peacekeeping missions, and host countries that want more robust regime support with less intrusive mandated tasks. At the beginning of 2024, among the multidimensional operations, the only missions left were the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSCA) in the Central African Republic; the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Of these missions, MONUSCO has taken the first steps toward transitioning tasks to other actors, while MINUSCA and UNMISS have initiated transition planning to hand over tasks to national, regional, and other international actors.[1]

Concurrently, regional and ad hoc coalitions have increasingly become the favored choice when countries are confronting internal conflict.[2] For fledgling host governments, these coalitions come with several benefits: they are most often composed of troops from host and neighboring countries, giving participating

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countries a high degree of control over troops and their actions; they are less encumbered with accountability requirements than their UN counterparts; and they align with the self-interest of participating states.[3]

These developments correspond to a more global trend away from liberal peacebuilding aimed at supporting the development of liberal, inclusive, and decentralized states. There has been a confluence of more limited Western liberal ambitions (and an unwillingness to fund them) and stronger calls from the Global South for counterinsurgency and counterterrorist missions. The human rights agenda has also been under pressure, with China putting the brakes on human rights language in mandates and pushing for cuts in human rights posts in budget discussions on UN peace operations.[4]

For the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the UN Department of Operational Support, these trends present a twofold dilemma: There is a rapidly diminishing demand for peace operations overall;[5] in particular, for *liberal* and *impartial* peace operations. Instead, a future is unfolding where the UN will be, at best, in a supporting role, providing planning, material, and logistical support.

The reluctance to mandate new UN multidimensional peacekeeping missions and the corresponding increase in regional and ad hoc coalitions are part of a larger trend in global governance. While some have argued that this may give a larger role to regional organizations, this is not the case for peace operations. On the African continent, it is subregional and ad hoc coalitions that have been deployed, with limited involvement from the African Union (AU). Financial support from the EU for the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) fighting Boko Haram has in part been rerouted to flow more directly to the MNJTF instead of through the AU, contributing to an overall trend of informalization and deinstitutionalization of global governance.[6]

In the first section of the essay, I examine the 2023 policy brief *A New Agenda for Peace*, released by the UN secretary-general to prepare for the 2024 Summit of the Future, as well as the *Pact for the Future*, the outcome document of the 2024 UN summit. These documents can give us a better sense of the UN's vision for UN peacekeeping and its relationship with AU peace support operations, as well as subregional and ad hoc coalitions. In the next section, I proceed to look more closely at the relationship between the UN peace operations machinery and regional and ad hoc coalitions, as this will be one of the possible ways for the UN to stay engaged in peace operations going forward. Finally, I look at the

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normative consequences of this evolving relationship, in particular, for the guiding principle of impartiality, and I argue that with increasing support to regional and ad hoc coalitions this will be more a principle in theory than in practice. I conclude by looking ahead from the Summit of the Future and beyond, sketching out some areas in policy and academic research that need more work. The essay draws on policy documents, academic literature, and data from interviews with sixteen UN officials conducted in New York in November 2023.

A New Agenda for Peace: Visionary or an Obituary for UN Peacekeeping?

Peacekeeping is not explicitly mentioned in the UN Charter. Still, as eloquently elaborated by Jennifer Welsh and Marie-Joëlle Zahar in the introduction to this roundtable, peacekeeping has evolved to become a central tool in the international community's peace and security toolbox.[7] Over the years, the number of missions, their tasks, and their scope have evolved significantly.[8] The ideal of liberal peacekeeping was developed during the 1990s and 2000s in a period where there was an overall decrease in the number of conflicts in the world and increasing ambitions about the type of support UN peacekeeping could offer to countries emerging from conflict. These missions, which generally included a significant number of military troops, police, and civilians with a wide range of protection, peacebuilding, and state-building tasks, were costly but also largely successful.[9]

However, over the last decade UN peacekeeping has been sliding down a slippery slope. Starting in 2012, UN peacekeeping has been given mandates to "neutralize" identified groups[10] using force in the DRC; to counter threats posed by terrorist groups in Mali;[11] and to provide material, logistical, and intelligence support to counterterrorist forces, such as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) through a dedicated support office in Somalia and through the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).[12] These actions have taken the UN far beyond the key principles of peacekeeping: consent of the main parties, impartiality, and nonuse of force except in self-defense and in defense of the mandate.[13]

One could perhaps expect that when launching *A New Agenda for Peace*, the secretary-general would try to reinvigorate peacekeeping as the international

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community's central instrument in the international peace-and-security toolbox and create a new vision for UN peacekeeping in the twenty-first century. However, rather than a call to action, the Agenda reads more like an obituary. The emphasis is on the doctrinal and operational limitations of UN peacekeeping, and how African-led peace support operations—namely, counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations—should be given more support by the UN.

In the document, UN peacekeeping is clearly out of favor. The Agenda calls for a

> . . . reflection on the limits and future of peacekeeping . . . enabling more nimble, adaptable and effective mission models while devising transition and exit strategies. This should clearly reflect the comparative strengths and successes of peacekeeping, as well as its doctrinal and operational limitations, as a tool that relies on strategic consent and the support of critical parties.[14]

The emphasis for UN peacekeeping in the brief is on transitions and exit strategies. It is paradoxical then, that while the Agenda vigorously supports the idea of delegating peace operations to regional organizations, in particular the African Union, it also maintains that "the impartiality of the Secretariat is and will remain its strongest asset, and needs to be fiercely guarded."[15] This follows an old trope and tradition within the Secretariat: while practices are moving further and further away from impartiality, the principle itself is not up for discussion. As one interlocutor told me in an interview in New York, "The three principles of peacekeeping are guiding the Department of Peace Operations. They are not open for debate among member states."[16] So the chasm between theory and practice continues to widen.

Following the somber spirit of the Agenda, the *Pact for the Future* did not raise the optimism for the future of UN peacekeeping. Instead, it asked for "a review on the future of all forms of United Nations peace operations" and requested that the secretary-general "provide strategic and action-oriented recommendations for the consideration of Member States on how the United Nations toolbox can be adapted to meet evolving needs, to allow for more agile, tailored responses to existing, emerging and future challenges."[17] UN officials are recognizing the bleak prospects for UN peacekeeping as well: "The intent of the [secretary-general] is to get the UN out of the peace operations space. . . . The [secretary-general] does not want the UN to be an operational player in this area in the future, but enable and support others."[18] Let us look a bit closer at how support to the AU peace support operations, as well as to subregional and ad hoc coalitions, has evolved.

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UN Support to AU Peace Support Operations and Coalitions

During the last decade, UN peacekeeping has been transformed in new ways. There has been a move from peacekeeping toward stabilization and counterterrorism,[19] undermining the principle of impartiality by making the UN a party to the conflict.[20] There are now calls for the UN to "review and expand [its] 'toolbox'" to support "a new generation of AU peace support operations."[21]

The first steps in this direction were taken in 2009 when establishing the UN Support Office for the African Union Mission in Somalia (UNSOA), funded by UN assessed contributions, to support AMISOM.[22] The mission was set up to support the Transitional Federal Government in Somalia and its forces' fight against Al-Shabaab. In 2015, UNSOA was replaced by the UN Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS). UNSOA/UNSOS has been quite controversial, for several reasons. The support office enabled the UN to assist an ongoing warfighting operation, AMISOM, which made the UN a party to the conflict and enabled more direct access to UN-assessed contributions for AU peace support operations. In 2017, the UNSC mandated MINUSMA to provide fuel, field rations, engineering support, and casualty evacuation to the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S).[23] The joint force consisted of troops from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger, and Mauritania conducting counterterrorism operations within their national territories. This meant that the operation was qualitatively different from the AMISOM operation, which mostly consisted of troops from neighboring countries.

The secretary-general is also pushing for a more flexible system of support that would include fewer or no multidimensional peacekeeping missions. According to *A New Agenda for Peace*, UN peacekeeping should be "more versatile, nimble and adaptable,"[24] and this also goes for UN support to AU-led peace support operations. Conceptualized as "new multilateralism" in the Agenda, peace operations should be outsourced to regional organizations—first and foremost, the AU—with a strong emphasis on partnerships and peace enforcement. This vision marks the end of an era of large multidimensional peacekeeping missions and could herald a new era of increased support to African-led peace operations provided with support by the UN: "When countries or regional organizations willing to conduct peace enforcement lack the required capabilities, [the UN should] provide support to those operations directly."[25]

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This is envisioned to be done by providing UN-assessed contributions to AU-led peace support operations. The issue has been subject to several discussions between the AU, the UN, and the UNSC, with an unsuccessful attempt to pass a UNSC resolution in 2018. The issue was given a boost at the end of 2023, when the UNSC adopted a resolution on financing AU peace support operations: UNSC Resolution 2719. The resolution noted the comparative advantage of the AU as a first responder with the political will to undertake support operations, and the need to provide predictable, adequate, and sustainable financing to these operations.[26] The resolution was the result of a long process and has raised the expectations for using UN-assessed contributions to fund AU peace support operations.

However, the devil is in the details and it is not clear how UNSC Resolution 2719 shall be operationalized. It sets a high bar for greenlighting UN funding of AU-led operations, with three core elements needing to be in place. First, there must be a mandate from the AU Peace & Security Council making the mission an AU-led peace support operation. Lesser forms of recognition by the Peace & Security Council, such as an authorization, endorsement, or recognition, will not pass the bar, as these are used by the council to recognize subregional and ad hoc coalitions that are not led by the AU. This means that operations such as the MNJTF, the FC-G5S, and the Southern African Development Community missions in Mozambique (SAMIM) and the DRC (SAMIDRC) do not satisfy this criterion. Second, the mission should be jointly planned, removing the element of speed that subregional and ad hoc coalitions have. Third, financial and human rights accountability frameworks must be in place, as neither UN nor AU rules and regulations are adapted to this funding scheme. UN regulations are not set up for funding counterinsurgency or counterterrorism operations, something experience from Somalia has made painfully clear.[27]

Accountability Frameworks: Theory and Practice

Support to the AU in Somalia and the G5 Sahel joint force (FC-G5S) has been premised on the implementation and monitoring of an accountability framework. In 2013, the UN established a Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) to ensure that support to counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations did not violate UN principles, rules, and regulations.[28] In the case of Somalia, there has been a Joint Working Group in place since 2014 to monitor the implementation of the HRDDP, including for the AU and UN missions.[29] The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has provided support to set up and implement

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this framework for the FC-G5S,[30] as have several civil society organizations.[31] UNSC Resolution 2719 emphasizes that funding would be approved on a case-by-case basis, that robust financial and human rights accountability frameworks need to be in place, and that the operations should be under the command and control of the AU.[32]

These conditions highlight the lingering concerns that result from outsourcing peace operations to other actors; namely, that UN principles of human rights and accountability will be sidelined.[33] From the time of the adoption of the HRDDP until the present,[34] much effort has been put into developing and implementing this framework. It has been applied in Somalia and Mali, where there have been dedicated UN support offices providing support to the AMISOM in Somalia and the FC-G5S in Mali. ATMIS (and its predecessor AMISOM) have been under the command and control of the AU, and the HRDDP has been implemented by the AU and the UN.[35] Nevertheless, a number of cases of human rights violations by AMISOM—including extrajudicial killings, rape, harm to civilians, and sexual abuse—have been documented, although these have been on a downward curve since 2015.[36]

In the case of Mali, the FC-G5S can be characterized as an ad hoc coalition that has not been under the command and control of the AU. Despite this, it has received support from the UN through MINUSMA while the troops have been operating within the five countries' national borders.[37] The FC-G5S has only been operational for brief periods, and the troops have been part of national forces conducting counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations the rest of the time. These forces have committed grave violations of human rights. For instance, in 2021 Human Rights Watch had already documented more than six hundred unlawful killings by the security forces of Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali.[38] There were also several cases recorded where the national forces were operating as the FC-G5S.[39] The UN support to the FC-G5S thus had the opposite effect of what was intended, as the "abuses conducted by the Malian army swelled the ranks of the insurgency" by driving up local support for its cause.[40]

The UN, through its peacekeeping operations in the DRC and Mali, and the support office in Somalia, has thus become a party to the conflict[41] in the eyes of local populations as well as in legal terms. As a result, UN troops become combatants and lawful targets under international humanitarian law.[42] While the UN secretary-general maintains in *A New Agenda for Peace* that the impartiality of the UN is its strongest asset, UN peace operations are thus increasingly becoming partial on the ground. Why does this matter? Although

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UN peacekeeping has proven to be a dynamic and flexible tool to engage in conflict-ridden countries around the world, impartiality has continued to be promoted as a core principle. There is, however, a limit to how long practice can move from the principle before it is ringing so hollow that it cannot be ignored anymore.

Conclusion

UN peacekeeping is under a threefold pressure: a geopolitical standoff resulting in no mandating of new operations; states wanting to save money and cut multidimensional peacekeeping operations; and an increasingly vocal Global South that has asked for funding and support for regime-supporting counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations. During the last decade, the UN has developed a niche capacity to provide regional and ad hoc coalitions with material, logistical, and human rights capacity support. This has fulfilled the request for more robust regime support from states experiencing conflict.

Although increased support to regional and ad hoc coalitions may be a way for the UN system to survive in an era of peacekeeping decline, there should be some red lines regarding what types of support the UN can give and what kinds of coalitions could be eligible for such support. These should include, at a minimum, that the host regime is elected in free and fair elections, that the troops forming the coalition do not operate within their own borders, and that there is a robust human rights accountability system in place.

Even if these criteria are met, the UNSC should be very discerning in its choice to mandate support to regional and ad hoc coalitions through UN support offices or similar arrangements. Although these arrangements provide much needed work for the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the UN Department of Operational Support, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, such a development also contributes to the continued weakening of the UN's commitment to impartiality as a core value. The success cases of ad-hoc coalitions are few and far between, and it is not likely that further support to short-term militarized approaches is going to change this picture. If this type of partnership continues, the UN system, including its humanitarian and human rights components, will no longer be able to claim impartiality in countries where the UN is financing African-led interventions that prop up fledgling regimes to fight opposition and terrorist groups.

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Notes

[1] *UN Transitions in a Fractured Multilateral Environment*, Security Council Report 4 (New York: Security Council Report, December 2023).

[2] For more on ad hoc coalitions, see, e.g., Yf Reykers, John Karlsrud, Malte Brosig, Stephanie C. Hofmann, Cristiana Maglia, and Pernille Rieker, "Ad Hoc Coalitions in Global Governance: Short-Notice, Task- and Time-Specific Cooperation," *International Affairs* 99, no. 2 (March 2023), pp. 727–45.

[3] Stephanie C. Hofmann, John Karlsrud, and Yf Reykers, "Ad Hoc Coalitions: From Hierarchical to Network Accountability in Peace Operations?," *Global Policy* 15, no. 1 (2023), pp. 121–27; and John Karlsrud, "'Pragmatic Peacekeeping' in Practice: Exit Liberal Peacekeeping, Enter UN Support Missions?," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 17, no. 3 (May 2023), pp. 258–72.

[4] This is somewhat understated in the most recent study on the topic: Charles T. Hunt, Emma Bapt, Adam Day, et al., *UN Peace Operations & Human Rights: A Thematic Study* (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2024). However, in previous scholarship there is already a lot of scrutiny of this development. See Christoph Zürcher, "China as Peacekeeper—Past, Present and Future," *International Journal* 75, no. 2 (2020), pp. 136–38; Gisela Hirschmann, "Cooperating with Evil? Accountability in Peace Operations and the Evolution of the United Nations Human Rights Due Diligence Policy," *Cooperation and Conflict* 55, no. 1 (March 2020), pp. 22–40; Emily Paddon Rhoads, "Putting Human Rights Up Front: Implications for Impartiality and the Politics of UN Peacekeeping," *International Peacekeeping* 26, no. 3 (2019), pp. 281–301; and Samuli Harju, "Missed Deadlines, Difficult Compromises, Ongoing Divisions: Reviewing the Fifth Committee's 2019 Session on Peacekeeping," Center for Civilians in Conflict, August 14, 2019, civiliansinconflict.org/blog/reviewing-fifth-committee-session/.

[5] Host states are also asking special political missions to exit at a rapid rate—the political missions in Somalia and Iraq were both asked to leave during May 2024. For more, see, for example, Damilola Banjo, "Iraq Wants the UN Mission Gone by 2025 amid a Global Wave of Similar Shakeups," PassBlue, May 12, 2024, www.passblue.com/2024/05/12/iraq-wants-the-un-mission-gone-by-2025-amid-a-global-wave-of-similar-shakeups.

[6] Malte Brosig and John Karlsrud, "How Ad Hoc Coalitions Deinstitutionalize International Institutions," *International Affairs* 100, no. 2 (March 2024), pp. 771–89.

[7] Jennifer Welsh and Marie-Joëlle Zahar, "What Future for Peace Operations?," *Ethics & International Affairs* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2024).

[8] Ibid.

[9] Lise Morjé Howard, *UN Peacekeeping in Civil Wars* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Lisa Hultman, Jacob Kathman, and Megan Shannon, "United Nations Peacekeeping and Civilian Protection in Civil War," *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 4 (October 2013), pp. 875–91.

[10] United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Resolution 2098, S/RES/2098 (March 28, 2013), p. 7.

[11] UNSC, Resolution 2100, S/RES/2100 (April 25, 2013), p. 7.

[12] For UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) support to AMISOM, now the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia, or ATMIS, see UNSC, Resolution 2657, S/RES/2657 (October 31, 2022); and UNSC, Resolution 2710, S/RES/2710 (November 15, 2023). For the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force, see UNSC, Resolution 2391, S/RES/2391 (December 8, 2017); UNSC, Resolution 2351, S/RES/2531 (June 29, 2020). Information sharing with parallel actors has also included a practice by MINUSMA of sharing "targeting packs" with the French-led Operation Barkhane, a practice that effectively made MINUSMA a party to the conflict. For more on this, see John Karlsrud, "From Liberal Peacebuilding to Stabilization and Counterterrorism," *International Peacekeeping* 26, no. 1 (2019), pp. 1–21, at p. 14.

[13] John Karlsrud, "The UN at War: Examining the Consequences of Peace-Enforcement Mandates for the UN Peacekeeping Operations in the CAR, the DRC and Mali," *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2015), pp. 40–54; and Mateja Peter, "Global Fragmentation and Collective Security Instruments: Weakening the Liberal International Order from Within," *Politics and Governance* 12, Art. 7357 (February 2024), pp. 1–15.

[14] António Guterres, *A New Agenda for Peace*, Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9 (New York: United Nations, July 2023), p. 24.

[15] Ibid., p. 14.

[16] UN official, interview by John Karlsrud, November 13, 2023, New York.

[17] United Nations, *Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations* (New York: UN, September 2024), p. 16.

[18] UN official, interview by John Karlsrud, November 14, 2023, New York.

[19] David Curran and Paul Holtom, "Resonating, Rejecting, Reinterpreting: Mapping the Stabilization Discourse in the United Nations Security Council, 2000–14," *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 4, no. 1 (2015), pp. 1–18; Karlsrud, "From Liberal Peacebuilding to Stabilization and Counterterrorism"; and Allard Duursma, Corinne Bara, Nina Wilén, et al., "UN Peacekeeping at 75: Achievements, Challenges, and Prospects," *International Peacekeeping* 30, no. 4 (2023), pp. 415–76.

[20] Karlsrud, "UN at War."

[21] "Towards Stronger Global-Regional Peace & Security Partnerships" (meeting summary, Challenges Annual Forum, Addis Adaba, October 26–27, 2023), p. 1, challengesforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CAF23-Key-Takeaways.pdf.

[22] Renamed the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) in April 2022.

[23] UNSC, Resolution 2391. MINUSMA was a UN peacekeeping operation tasked with supporting the stabilization of the security situation in Mali after the Tuareg rebellion of 2012 and the subsequent interventions by French and African forces. The mission was a clear outlier and quite controversial in the context of UN peacekeeping, as it was deployed into an ongoing counterterrorism situation. For more, see, for example, Jaïr van der Lijn, Noura Abouelnasr, Tofayel Ahmed, et al., *Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in Mali / MINUSMA* (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2019).

[24] António Guterres, *A New Agenda for Peace*, Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9 (New York: United Nations, July 2023), p. 24.

[25] Ibid., p. 25.

[26] UNSC, Resolution 2719, S/RES/2719 (December 21, 2024).

[27] Paul D. Williams, *UN Support to Regional Peace Operations: Lessons from UNSOA* (New York: International Peace Institute, February 2017). For an analysis of UNSC Resolution 2719, see Eugene Chen, *Next Steps on the Financing of African Peace Support Operations: Unpacking Security Council Resolution* 2719 (2023) (New York: Center on International Cooperation, New York University, February 2024).

[28] United Nations General Assembly / Security Council, "Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on United Nations Support to Non-United Nations Security Forces," annex in A/67/775–S/2013/110 (March 5, 2013).

[29] The setup in Somalia is quite complicated. The AU has a peace support operation, currently named the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia, or ATMIS. It is provided logistical support by UNSOS. The UN has also deployed the special political mission UNSOM.

[30] "Project Supporting the G5 Sahel Joint Force with Implementation of the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Compliance Framework," Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/AfricaRegion/Pages/G5-Sahel.aspx.

[31] Among these organizations is Center for Civilians in Conflict, or CIVIC. For more, see "Our Work," Center for Civilians in Conflict, civiliansinconflict.org/our-work/.

[32] UNSC, Resolution 2719.

[33] Hofman et al., "Ad Hoc Coalitions"; and Benjamin Petrini and Erica Pepe, "Peacekeeping in Africa: From UN to Regional Peace Support Operations," International Institute for Strategic Studies, March 18, 2024, www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2024/03/peacekeeping-in-africa-from-un-to-regional-peace-support-operations/.

[34] United Nations, "Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on United Nations Support to Non-United Nations Security Forces; Guidance Note and Text of the Policy" (New York: United Nations, 2015).

[35] "ATMIS and UN Group Focus on Civilian Protection and Human Rights Implementation in Somalia," ATMIS, December 5, 2023, atmis-au.org/atmis-and-un-group-focus-on-civilian-protection-and-human-rights-implementation-in-somalia/.

[36] European Asylum Support Office, *Somalia Actors: Country of Origin Information Report* (Brussels: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021), pp. 71–72.

[37] "[The] notion of peacekeeping is to operate beyond your borders. Although there is a precedence with G5 Sahel, it is little appetite in the UNSC for such a model." UN official, interview by John Karlsrud, 2023.

[38] "Sahel: End Abuses in Counterterrorism Operations," Human Rights Watch, February 13, 2021, www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/13/sahel-end-abuses-counterterrorism-operations.

[39] "Project Supporting the G5 Sahel Joint Force."

[40] Natasja Rupesinghe, *Resist, Negotiate, Submit? Civilian Agency and Jihadism in Central Mali* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2023), p. 6.

[41] For more on the case of MONUSCO in the DRC, see Karlsrud, "UN at War"; and Mona A. Khalil, "Robust Peacekeeping—Not Aggressive Peacekeeping," *Proceedings of the ASIL Annual Meeting* 112 (2018), pp. 114–17. Khalil was previously the senior legal officer for the Office of the Legal Counsel at the United Nations.

[42] Bruce Oswald, Tristan Ferraro, Marten Zwanenburg, Mona Khalil, and Johan Heyns, "Peace Forces at War: Implications under International Humanitarian Law," *American Society of International Law / Proceedings of the Annual Meeting* (April 2014), pp. 149–63.

Abstract: While the UN secretary-general maintains in the 2023 *New Agenda for Peace* that the impartiality of the United Nations is its strongest asset, the UN is increasingly becoming partial on the ground. The trend that started with the inclusion of the Force Intervention Brigade in the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2013 is accelerating and taking on new forms. The UN has been supporting the African Union Mission in Somalia and providing logistical support to the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force in Mali. In December 2023, the UN Security Council agreed on a resolution that should enable the predictability and sustainability of assessed contributions to African-led counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations, on certain conditions. The normative consequences of increased support to African-led interventions are significant and little explored. The UN system, including humanitarian and human rights components, will no longer be able to claim impartiality in countries where the UN is financing African-led interventions that are propping up fledgling regimes against opposition and terrorist groups. This essay will unpack and examine these developments and their consequences for UN peacekeeping and the larger UN system.

Keywords: ad hoc coalitions, African Union, enforcement, impartiality, peacekeeping, United Nations