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RESEARCH BRIEF 3/2018

Security Institute for Governance and Leadership in Africa

[SIGLA @ Stellenbosch](#)

Author: Professor T. Mandrup (SIGLA)

Series Editor: Professor F. Vreÿ (SIGLA)

The African Peace and Security Architecture – a system for the past or adapting to the future?

The African Standby Force (ASF) has been declared to have reached full operational capability (FOC), in four out of the five African regions. Full Operational Capability was the conclusion of the so-called [Gambari validation report](#) of December 2017, that followed in the wake of the announcement of the African Chiefs of Defence (January 2016) and the [Amani II field exercise](#) held in South Africa during October-November 2015.

Full Operational Capability is a major achievement and illustrates how far the African Union (AU) member states have come in transforming the vision of enabling the AU, through its sub-regional organisations and entities, to function as a security manager on the continent. However, studying the report, a number of critical questions related to these conclusions have to be asked. In some aspects the Gambari declaration of FOC seems to be a [political decision](#), rather than an objective conclusion based on the findings in the report, pending on what FOC means. To mention a few matters found in the report, the following are of concern: Several of the regions have not validated their pledged capabilities for several years, if ever, and a number of the logistical and support structures for the regional forces are only in the planning phase, or in the process of being established; there is also still uncertainty in the decision-making process framework around deployment, where the regions regularly express concerns; and finally the funding of operations remains a challenge. Despite its shortfalls, AU member states have shown, that when the political will is there to support a deployment, military forces can be deployed rather rapidly. However, deployments are increasingly done by robust ad hoc military coalitions, and not by the envisaged ASF structures. The biggest challenge for the ASF to be used as an efficient tool is therefore the ability of finding the required collective political will and cohesion in the AU to make deployments possible. The crisis in Burundi and South Sudan serve as cases in point where the ASF was supposed to be deployed, but failed to do so.

The process of establishing the ASF has been delayed, and the concept has gone through several [reform phases in response to changes](#) in the context that it was supposed to address. One of the important developments was the introduction of the Rapid Deployment Capability (RDC) concept in 2008, as an integrated part of the ASF model. However, despite regional deployments in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Gambia, the ASF is yet to deploy in its full format. Thus far the AU deployments have been undertaken by coalitions of states, like the SADC Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in DR Congo, the Regional Task Force against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and the AMISOM forces in Somalia. The tendency to use robust ad hoc forces puts pressure on the ASF concept, both in

terms of double-hatting of the pledged capabilities, but also in terms of the conceptual and doctrinal base of the ASF.

The emergent ad hoc coalitions are often motivated by a narrow national interest logic that works against the common security idea driving the African Peace and Security Architecture's link with the ASF. Ad hoc coalitions also lay claim to the same limited capabilities available to the ASF, and negatively affects the capacity of the member states to commit to and help establish the ASF structures that ultimately depend upon member-country participation. Ad hoc coalitions strive to fill the operational vacuum left by the ASF, and it remains to be seen if the declaration of FOC changes this trend. The ad hoc model comprises of willing and capable contributing countries that make these forces more responsive than the regional ASF structures in times of crisis. Current examples are the G5 Sahel force, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNTJF) against Boko Haram, and the interim African Capacity for the Immediate Response to Crisis ([ACIRC](#)) standby arrangement. Countries contributing to the MNTJF and the G5 forces have pressing common national security concerns compelling them to cooperate, and tied together by geography. The ACIRC (created out of frustration with the existing ASF structure), is a break-away from the normative logic of common security that underpins the AU's peace and security architecture and its military leg, the ASF. The members of ACIRC are driven by a different security thinking narrative related to national security concerns and the tendency to increasingly use robust force as a response to security challenges. This raises a number of questions in relation to military responses to essentially police tasks, ACIRC as a positive development versus that of not having other types of responses available and is it indicative of a possible shift in AU security management to the prominence of national security agendas of dominant states? In essence, one looks at a trend of moving away from the consensus principle embraced by the AU. In step with these questions, the AU now increasingly calls for a [harmonisation of the ad hoc, ACIRC and the ASF structures](#) which underlines their concern with aligning matters.

The future

The Gambari report and the increased number of ad hoc structures suggest that the future is likely to bring more ad hoc forces together with international support into the picture. The ASF will continue, but most likely change its focus, and become the framework for deployments to take place in order to harness the best of both worlds. An example could be the role played by the East African Standby Force in relation to [Burundi](#), where it did undertake the planning of force, but would accommodate out-of-region troops to generate the required force numbers. The future calls for a more flexible deployment system, one which entails reformed ASF structures, room for ad hoc forces, mergers with other Africa Peace and Security Architecture tools, and cooperation with international actors.

Suggested further reading.

Francois Vreÿ and Mandrup, Thomas (Eds). [The African Standby Force – quo vadis?](#) Sun Media, 2017.

Cedric de Coning, Gelot, Linnéa and Karlsrud, John (Eds). [Future of African Peace Operations: From Janjaweed to Boko Haram](#), Zed Books, 2016.

African Union, Report of the Independent Panel of Experts Assessment of the African Standby Force, 10 December 2013.

Professor Thomas Mandrup is from the faculty of the Royal Danish Defence College and Extraordinary Professor to SIGLA, Stellenbosch University.

E-mail: thomasm@sun.ac.za