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J. of Modern African Studies, 55, 2 (2017), pp. 275–299 © Cambridge University Press 2017
doi:10.1017/S0022278X17000040

The AU Task Forces: an African response to transnational armed groups

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the Task Forces created by the African Union (AU) to address the security threats posed by Boko Haram and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). It argues that these Task Forces are well suited to address transnational armed groups whose ambiguous political goals and extreme violence make traditional conflict resolution ineffective. Although the Task Forces fall within the AU's collective security mandate and broadly within the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), their distinct characteristics make it more capable of addressing these new cross-border threats. Their reliance on nationally funded and directed militaries also allow the Task Forces to fulfil both the goals of the AU and the interests of the regimes that take leadership roles within these structures.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X17000040 Published online by Cambridge University Press

INTRODUCTION

While they differ in ideology and organisation, the Boko Haram and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgencies represent changes in the broader patterns of conflict in Africa. Full-scale civil wars have given way to fragmented armed groups with decentralised power bases that sprawl across remote border regions (Straus 2012). While both groups have issued political statements, neither's behaviour has indicated a programme to usurp any regime. Rather, their use of extreme violence appears to be about enabling their survival in state peripheries where African regimes are unable to project authority over remote territories that contain sparse populations with little capacity to resist (Herbst 2014). The result has been regional insecurity and humanitarian crises across multiple countries, and their cross-border nature makes dealing with Boko Haram and the LRA particularly difficult. Indeed, these insurgents would remain out of reach of state security forces without regional cooperation. Moreover, their use of violence against civilians undermines the validity of their espoused political positions, rendering political negotiations ineffective.

As Boko Haram and the LRA have metastasised from localised insurgencies into regional threats, African regimes have responded through bilateral and multilateral security arrangements. Uganda, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) attempted joint operations against the LRA through a trilateral arrangement in December 2008 (UNSC 27.3.2009). However, logistical and political challenges prompted the coalition to request AU support for a 5,000-strong Regional Task Force (RTF) in 2011 (PSC 22.11.2011). Similarly, the sub-regional Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) endeavoured to cooperate against Boko Haram in 2012, yet challenges similar to the LRA case eventually led the LCBC states to seek AU backing for the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) (PSC 3.3.2015).

This article shows how these Task Forces have developed into distinct structures within Africa's collective security architecture that is otherwise circumscribed by the African Common Defence and Security Policy and the Constituent Act of the AU, the regional self-defence regime that authorises Peace Support Operations (PSOs). As the RTF and MNJTF address the threats posed by the LRA and Boko Haram, respectively, they also impact the broader security landscape in Africa that has been moving incrementally towards the establishment of the African Standby Force (ASF). By assessing the development of the RTF and MNJTF, the article argues that the Task Force structure developed in

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X17000040 Published online by Cambridge University Press

direct response to transnational armed groups and within the permissive political conditions of Africa's regional peace and security institutions, particularly the delayed operationalisation of the ASF.

But while the Task Force structure is distinct, we argue that it remains consistent with more durable aspects of Africa's regional politics. Here regional cooperation is more of a by-product of regime security because the Task Forces operate within a framework that protects state sovereignty while also providing resources and political legitimacy for military action. As such, the Task Forces create a framework for states to cooperate while pursuing their national interests. In turn, the Task Forces give the resource-scarce AU a cost-effective mechanism to fulfil its mandate to strengthen member state cooperation on defence matters and work towards peace and security on the continent (AU 28.2.2004).

The RTF and the MNJTF have yet to eliminate the LRA and Boko Haram and restore security to their respective regions. They have, however, as the case studies demonstrate, limited these threats by enhancing effective cooperation, managing regional tensions, and increasing the sustainability of a military arrangement that addresses cross-border insurgencies. The key implication is that because this new arrangement lies outside of the broader ASF structure, and is comprised of troops serving narrowly defined national interests, it dilutes AU command and control and limits the PSC's ability to provide strategic guidance. Similarly, as the Task Forces are mechanisms of military cooperation, the ability to develop robust multidimensional capacities to address insurgencies is limited. Indeed, such measures are often resisted by regimes that prefer a restricted role for the AU.

Examining these AU Task Forces matters from several perspectives. First, the structure raises new questions about the AU's evolving security architecture, not just in terms of how the AU and its member states deal with transnational threats, but also how they collectively navigate obstacles in establishing permanent ASF structures. Looking at the inner workings of the Task Forces provides insight into how such arrangements affect the substantive outcome of regional stability. Second, the Task Force question speaks to how scholars understand the constitutive dimensions of international organisations more generally, particularly the intersection between regime interests, institutional self-interest, and delegated authority (Barnett & Finnemore 2004; Hawkins *et al.* 2006). Finally, from a policy perspective, outside actors seeking to intervene in conflicts located in regions with weak states should seek to

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understand the complex interactions between regime politics, regional institutions, and the evolving nature of security threats.

This article proceeds with a historical review of Africa's regional peace and security arrangements. It then sketches the changing nature of conflict in Africa, followed by a more in-depth look at the institutional development of the Task Force as a mechanism for dealing with regional threats. The article shows the Task Force's distinctiveness vis-à-vis orthodox security cooperation regimes in Africa. It explains how the construct falls within the PSC's mandate to provide a framework for AU member states to cooperate in defence matters, yet still allows them to pursue their own interests. Comparative evidence from the Boko Haram and LRA cases then show how these threats have given rise to the Task Forces as distinct yet logical extensions of Africa's regional peace and security architecture. The article concludes with implications for the development of more formal African defence frameworks. Data for this article come from secondary sources, newspapers, first-hand accounts, semi-structured interviews, and a review of key AU documents.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMON AFRICAN DEFENCE FRAMEWORK

The idea of a common African defence framework was considered during the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 (Ijomah 1977), but Africa's new states instead chose to institutionalise the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in national affairs (OAU 1963). While the OAU established a Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration and a Defence Commission, the former was only given jurisdiction over inter-state disputes and never had a case brought before it, while the Assembly generally ignored proposals from the latter (OAU 1963: Article XIX, XX; OAU 1964; Walraven 2010: 41–2). It was not until the Cold War ended that African leaders began to rethink the relationship between regional structures and internal conflict.

The end of the bipolar global rivalry allowed for new forms of cooperation in Africa, but the withdrawal of superpower support also ushered in a new complex series of conflicts (Reno 1999). Consequently, African leaders began to search for institutions that addressed both the growing threat of insurgencies and Western concerns for 'good governance', which had progressively become a condition for international assistance.

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In 1990, the OAU Assembly adopted the *Declaration on the Political and Socio-Economic Situation in Africa and the Fundamental Changes Taking Place in the World* (OAU 1990), which formally brought all conflicts – even civil wars – under the organisation's mandate. Then in 1993 the Commission on Mediation was replaced with the *Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution*. Its objectives included both conflict prevention and peacebuilding, but the Mechanism was restricted to limited observer missions (OAU 1993: Articles 15 & 16). Moreover, the Mechanism still had to respect the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention, meaning all missions required consent from the parties to a conflict (OAU 1993: Article 14). Africa's civil wars in the 1990s showed that this requirement impeded the Mechanism's ability to address conflict. OAU member states decided that the best way to confront continental security needs was to radically reformulate the organisation, a process that culminated in the establishment of the AU in 2002.

While the AU's Constitutive Act maintained sovereignty as a primary principle, it became the first organisation to explicitly enshrine the right of forceful intervention, such that the 'grave circumstances' of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity became grounds for interfering in the domestic affairs of member states (OAU 2000: Articles 4(h) & 4(j); Kioko 2003). The AU Assembly acquired power to authorise interventions both upon the request of a state and on its own initiative (Sturman & Hayatou 2010). To institutionalise these new endeavours, the AU established the Peace and Security Council (PSC), which saw its powers of intervention quickly extended beyond 'grave circumstances' to include 'serious threat to legitimate order' (AU 2003b: Article 4(h)). While the PSC is supported by other structures under the African Union Commission, including the Panel of the Wise, the Peace Fund, the Continental Early Warning System, and the African Standby Force (ASF), it remains the pinnacle of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) (Brosig 2014), and has launched several PSOs since becoming operational in addition to the two Task Forces discussed in this article.[1]

Despite its central security role, the PSC's ability to live up to its mandate is limited by political and logistic barriers that preclude timely mission planning, funding, and troop contributions (Wiklund & Ingerstad 2015). To meet this challenge, the AU planned for the ASF to rapidly respond to sudden and severe outbreaks of violence (AU 2015b), yet continues to struggle to make the ASF fully operational due to challenges of training, access to resources, and strategic command and control.

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Without an operational ASF, the AU was incapable of responding quickly when rebels threatened the Malian government in 2012. Instead, France sent an intervention force to quell the rebellion, revealing real weaknesses in Africa's peace and security architecture (de Coning 2014; Wiklund & Ingerstad 2015). In response, several African states proposed a new rapid response mechanism called The African Capacity for the Immediate Response to Crisis (ACIRC), which attempted to address the obstacles inhibiting the ASF through alternate funding and staffing models. However, when the AU attempted to operationalise the ACIRC, it encountered similar challenges (Brosig & Sempijja 2015). It also met political opposition from states that believed it deviated from the AU's commitment to vest peace and security institutions evenly throughout the continent (de Coning 2014; Louw-Vaudran 2014; Wiklund & Ingerstad 2015). While 10 states signed on,[2] the 25th AU Assembly decided in June 2015 that the ACIRC would only be an interim measure (AU 2015c).

There is a wealth of information on the development of APSA, but there is scant scholarly debate on the role Task Forces might play within it. The lack of attention in policy circles may come from the view that Task Forces are simply ad hoc arrangements between the affected member states rather than a construct distinct from traditional PSOs. Despite the absence of discussion, the Regional Cooperation Initiative Against the LRA (RCI-LRA) was extended by the PSC for a fifth time in May 2016 (PSC 30.5.2016), and its Task Force element became the blueprint for the MNJTF against Boko Haram (AU 2014b).

From a scholarly perspective, the Task Forces are novel constructs within APSA that differ from traditional PSOs as they do not seek to support a political settlement but rather an outright military victory over armed groups. They also seek to maintain a higher degree of state control over command and strategy choices. This makes them attractive to African governments fearful of losing autonomy to AU PSC and their force commanders. In addition, the transnational design of the Task Forces and the ability of national forces to operate both within and outside their own territory renders them capable of responding quickly to the sorts of threats that are on the rise in Africa, while circumventing several of the barriers that stalled ASF and ACIRC operationalisation. For these reasons the emergence of the Task Force structure, particularly vis-à-vis traditional AU PSOs, merits further attention.

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CHANGING WARFARE, CHANGING THREATS AND THE AU TASK FORCES

In the absence of any continental rapid response forces (as the ASF or ACIRC should be), the Task Forces are responses to a shift in the nature of Africa's wars from full-blown confrontations between state militaries and rebellions to those involving more nebulous armed actors operating in the hinterlands of state peripheries.

Historically, the threat of overthrow by armed rebellion or coup d'état was the primary concern of African regimes. Separatist movements, 'reform' insurgencies and 'warlords', despite having different motivations, posed direct threats to domestic political establishments, and regimes had to decide whether to attempt to destroy these insurgents militarily or to incorporate them through peace agreements (Clapham 1998; Reno 1999; 2011; Day 2011). Indeed, many rebels fought not to replace regimes, but to gain access to state authority networks (Englebert 2009).

Few of Africa's rebellions have been successful in overthrowing sitting regimes (Young 1996). Of approximately 150 rebellions since independence, only around 10% have experienced outright victories (UCDP Actor Dataset). Although this number increases to almost 50% when internal coups are included (McGowan 2003), most African regimes have developed safeguards to contain insurgent threats. Even coups, which certainly have not vanished, have declined in the aggregate (Barca & Ncube 2012). As such, wholesale changes in power are relatively rare. When they do occur, as in the case of the 2013 Séléka rebellion in the Central African Republic (CAR), they are subject to isolation and recrimination by both the regional and international community.

Consequently, many contemporary rebels have fundamentally different definitions of 'success'. Arising 'from blocked aspirations' or 'reactive desperation' these groups 'rage against' the dysfunctional institutional machinery of the state (Clapham 1998: 5; Bøas & Dunn 2007: 10).[3] Indeed, both the LRA and Boko Haram began as reactions to the state by marginalised communities, but once infused with elements of 'global insurgency' with ideological ties to transnational organisations, they began to pose a different set of threats (Hoffman 2005; Kilcullen 2006/2007). Violence transcended tactical purposes, becoming a 'divine duty' that allowed these groups to disregard prevailing political, moral and practical constraints (Hoffman 2006: 88). Concurrently, violence is used to promote a 'community' identity and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X17000040 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ideology and maintain organisational cohesion by making it difficult for members to defect.

Undeniably, groups like Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) were extremely predatory and part of a transnational network (Day 2015). But these groups were more conventional guerrilla forces seeking to defeat regimes militarily or join them through a political settlement. In contrast, the motivations of the LRA and Boko Haram appear to be indivisibly ideological as they seek more to damage and discredit incumbents than replace them. Moreover, regimes are unwilling to accommodate such groups because a political settlement is unlikely to tame them. Although the Ugandan government was part of the two-year Juba Peace Process with the LRA (Atkinson 2010), it anticipated the collapse of the negotiations and prepared a military solution in case of such events (UPDF General 2015 int.). The Nigerian government has not negotiated anything with Boko Haram beyond prisoner releases, as the group's stated goal of creating a separate Islamic state remains irreconcilable with Nigerian territorial and political integrity.

Thus, the problematic reliance of a traditional PSO on political solutions, the imperative to protect civilian populations, and the cross-border nature of the threats posed by the LRA and Boko Haram have compelled affected states and the AU to develop a new regional response. Had the ASF been operational, it is plausible that despite institutional shortcomings, its rapid response units would have confronted such threats. However, the security vacuum produced by the absence of these more durable structures necessitated the creation of a regional stopgap response. This is a matter to which we now turn.

The distinctiveness of the AU Task Forces

The AU Task Forces are rational expressions of the security imperatives of African regimes. But while regime interests have been the primary drivers of these constructs, they have also emerged within the permissive regional political environment of the AU's institutional interest in being effective stewards of regional peace and security. The Task Forces fall broadly within the AU's collective security architecture, including the PSC's mandate to authorise the use of force (OAU 2000: Article 4(d); 2002: Article 3(e) & Article 7), and they are consistent with the 2004 *Common African Defence and Security Policy* (AU 2004: Article 13). Nonetheless, the Task Force model is distinct in several key ways.

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Unlike the ASF, Task Forces do not have a predetermined security structure. They neither fit into the emerging ASF paradigm nor reflect traditional AU PSOs and their institutional relationships to other actors. AU peace support operations, like UN peacekeeping missions, work as distinct multilateral forces alongside national armies (or supplant collapsed ones) while serving as guarantors of ceasefires or transitions. The AU Task Forces, alternately, are comprised primarily of national forces operating within their national boundaries and at times in other states within a sub-region. States request that the AU create a Task Force not to assist in crafting a political settlement, but to pursue a military solution to a cross-border threat.

Although the LRA and Boko Haram operate on the periphery of states where government authority is relatively weak, the states that request the creation of a Task Force have functional regimes. As a result, Task Force structures do not contain robust multidimensional components like AU PSOs do. Instead, Task Forces build on existing regional arrangements that are already working to execute a common military plan. When asked if there should be a civilian component, a TCC member of the MNJTF stated: 'No. We are not a collapsed state. We will install the local government and provide the police once the territory is liberated' (MNJTF Planning Team member 2015 int.). Consequently, while the AU Task Forces may have military and even police liaison officers, they have a light footprint. This lean make-up means that Task Forces tend to be relatively inexpensive. While it is likely that requesting an AU mandate has stemmed at least partially out of TCC's expectations that additional resources will follow, the AU has nevertheless declared that participating countries bear primary responsibility for financing operations.

Task Force structures also provide political and logistic benefits for TCCs. For instance, although the AU only supports the small RTF Headquarters with funds from the European Union, American bilateral support for each TCC helps sustain RTF operations. Similar AU and bilateral support significantly assists the forces of the MNJTF. TCCs can use the framework to bolster the legitimacy of their operations, leveraging it to further increase international support. Rather than having to sell to intervention-allergic domestic audiences an ad hoc bilateral support package for a counter insurgency operation in a far-flung African country, donors can roll funding into well-established programmes that support African multilateral peace operations.

Additionally, the AU provides a framework to generate political consensus among the regional body's member states. This is particularly

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important in protracted multilateral counter-insurgency operations where the underlying factors that produced the coalition can change and increasing operational costs can foment domestic opposition. Most importantly, the AU mandate legitimises cross border military actions, assuaging concerns held by the international and domestic communities over the integrity of international boundaries.

Another distinction is that within the Task Forces, each TCC exerts a greater degree of control over the mission. This is because the TCCs operate largely from their own country, under their own tactical commands and with their own public funding. As a result, AU operational control is more tenuous than it would be under the ASF where the AU is the primary source of funding as well as strategic and tactical control. While TCCs in any peace operation often consult their capitals before launching kinetic operations (UN 2014), national strategic interests play a more significant role in the Task Forces. National influence over the Task Forces is also stronger because rather than creating a new mission, the AU is only modifying already existing multilateral security arrangements. In the case of Boko Haram, the LCBC Secretariat plays a more prominent role in the MNJTF than the AU. For the LRA case, though the RTF Commander exercises overall control, the national militaries determine the RTF's day-to-day operations on the ground.

As we demonstrate with the case studies, once the AU gets involved, the PSC mandate becomes progressively more important legally and politically, particularly given the extreme reluctance of African states to allow neighbours to operate within their own territory. Indeed, although AU influence over operations may at first be tenuous, the need of states to maintain the legitimacy of the AU framework, to access limited logistical benefits and receive cooperation from fellow AU member states, increases the Task Force arrangements' importance over time.

From an international perspective, the UN Security Council (UNSC) has endorsed the AU PSC's authorisation of force against the LRA and Boko Haram by issuing successive Presidential Statements (e.g. UNSC 19.12.2012, 25.11.2013, 10.12.2014, 19.1.2015, 13.5.2016). This further strengthens the legitimacy of the Task Forces' joint operations as well as the ability of the AU and UN to maintain political momentum for operations and to troubleshoot when necessary. In the LRA case, both the UN and the AU nominated Special Envoys to shuttle between capitals and report to their respective institutions. Similarly, the head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security lend

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X17000040 Published online by Cambridge University Press

their support to MNJTF operations. This sort of legitimacy is generally granted concurrently with the establishment of the Task Forces or afterwards, and both operate without a Chapter VII authorisation.

In contrast, for traditional AU PSOs, the PSC mandating authority is subordinate to the UN Charter, and the UNSC delegates Chapter VII authority to the regional institution to use force. In fact, the AU's ASF Policy Framework clearly states: 'AU regions will … seek AU authorisation for their interventions … while the AU will seek UNSC authorisation' (AU 2003a: 4). The process of gaining both global and regional levels of authorisation reinforces the hierarchy established in the UN Charter and ensures that the intervention has global consensus. The delegation of UN enforcement authority to the AU is also important in strengthening the regionalisation of peacekeeping, effectively creating a division of labour between the AU and UN in which the AU operations create peace and the UN consolidates it (a process that played out in Burundi, Darfur, Somalia, Mali and CAR). The High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations confirmed this norm, stating that UN missions should not conduct counterterrorism operations and that only a capable regional force or ad hoc coalition authorised by the UNSC should undertake enforcement (UN 2015: 33–4).

A key difference between a traditional AU PSO and a Task Force, then, is that while the UNSC provides Chapter VII resolutions for PSOs, it only provides the legally weaker Presidential Statement for a Task Force. There are several possible reasons why this is so. First, Chapter VII resolutions authorising AU missions normally include provisions for the use of UN regular budget support or call for UN member states to provide funding. Second, unlike traditional AU PSOs, most of which shift to UN peace operations, such a transition is not envisaged for a Task Force, as its primary objective is military victory. Moreover, in the case of Boko Haram the disinclination of the UN to provide oversight follows a reluctance of the TCCs to subject their armed forces to any constraints or criticism that could result from this. As such, the AU relies on its own legal mandate and its role as a collective self-defence apparatus to authorise the use of force, although it does report regularly to the UNSC on its activities (UN 1945: Article 51).

As argued above, the advantage of the AU Task Forces is that they receive limited logistical support, are relatively unencumbered by command and oversight, and receive institutional legitimacy from international and regional organisations. Herein lies a potential downside:

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Task Forces may undermine what some scholars view as a normative shift in Africa to a more collective security approach to addressing common problems based on awareness and understanding (Franke 2009). In line with the scholarly observation that African regimes strategically engage more powerful actors as a means of providing resources, the Task Force may very well slot into this familiar pattern (Clapham 1996; Bayart 2000). Due to the greater degree of control by the TCCs, there is the potential that a TCC could instrumentalise the AU and legitimise cross-border actions that may not be subject to sufficient scrutiny. Similarly, the Task Force model provides flexibility in mission control and rules of engagement that allow for implicit regional and domestic political imperatives to be woven into military actions that have been sold to, and ultimately endorsed by, the AU as necessary for regional peace and security in line with the PSC mandate.

That said, the AU does attach limited social and economic objectives to the Task Force mandates that temper the primacy of military solutions and go some distance in addressing socio-economic needs that may undergird conflict-related grievances. The RTF, for instance, is one mechanism within the broader RCI-LRA, which includes among other objectives the facilitation of humanitarian assistance and the support for rehabilitation efforts (PSC 22.11.2011). Similarly, the AU mandate for the MNJTF contains provisions for facilitating humanitarian assistance and the restoration of state authority (AU 2015a).

CASE STUDIES: THE RTF AND THE MNJTF

Fighting the Lord's Resistance Army

The history of the Lord's Resistance Army has been treated extensively elsewhere (Allen & Vlassenroot 2010). Suffice to say what began as a rebellion rooted in Ugandan domestic politics became a regional threat that has killed more than 100,000 civilians and displaced hundreds of thousands more across five countries. Estimates from 2006 put the number of LRA abductees at 66,000 (Annan *et al.* 2006), with hundreds abducted since (LRA Crisis Tracker 2015). While the LRA has repeatedly stated its aim to overthrow the Ugandan government, it has not shown any meaningful interest in negotiations, with peace agreements going unsigned and opportunities to lay down arms squandered. Instead the LRA has survived in the bush for nearly three decades by virtue of its organisational ability to adapt to shifting regional geopolitical conditions and to periods of resource abundance and scarcity.

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The LRA first became a regional problem in the mid-1990s as a Sudanese proxy against Uganda. In the early 2000s a rapprochement between Khartoum and Kampala gave the Ugandan People's Defence Forces (UPDF) permission to fight the LRA on Sudanese territory. In response, the LRA surged into Uganda, generating a massive humanitarian crisis while falling far short of overthrowing Uganda's government. By 2005, with the loss of its Sudanese sanctuaries, the LRA was routed by joint operations between the UPDF and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and subsequently sought a new safe haven.

In September 2005, the LRA shifted its fighters to the remote Garamba National Park in DRC. Over the following two years the LRA regrouped and rebuilt its force through a limited abduction campaign, while the gradual collapse of the Juba Peace Process signalled the group's unwillingness to settle with the Ugandan government. Then on 17 August 2008 the group launched a set of coordinated attacks on six localities in DRC and South Sudan, killing and abducting hundreds of civilians. In response, DRC, Uganda and South Sudan signed a tripartite agreement and launched Operation Lightning Thunder on 14 December (UPDF *et al.* 2008), whose objective was to decapitate the leadership of the LRA through a targeted air campaign. The LRA, however, had already relocated and the bombers missed their targets. Consequently, the partner countries mobilised their infantries to mount a more traditional counter-insurgency operation.

The Congolese government extended permission for the UPDF to remain in DRC beyond an initial three months, while the Ugandan and Congolese Chiefs of Defence Forces met almost every month to coordinate operations, occasionally with their Central African and SPLA counterparts. Although the government in Bangui was not party to the tripartite agreement, it joined the coalition as the LRA moved into the eastern part of CAR in 2009. When the CAR military was unable to handle the threat, President Bozizé requested the UPDF extend its operations into CAR. Likewise, the newly independent South Sudan reaffirmed an open-ended bilateral agreement with Uganda that had existed since March 2002. Within this framework, Ugandan forces were able to pursue the LRA across national boundaries with the consent and cooperation of other state militaries.

The Regional Task Force

Soon after counter-LRA operations began, the AU Assembly called for an action plan to help coordinate regional efforts, but institutional

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follow-up was limited because the informal agreements between the coalition partners were sufficiently effective. Finally, in October 2010, as the operation entered its third year, the AU convened a meeting where the four concerned states agreed to bring the joint brigade under a formal AU umbrella (AU 2010).

The coalition first experienced political turbulence when elections in DRC compelled Kabila to demonstrate his ability to manage national security without assistance from his neighbours. Kabila was perhaps emboldened by the diminished LRA presence in DRC due to joint operations between Ugandan and Congolese forces and Kony's call for LRA groups to gather in North-Eastern CAR. As a result, on 30 September 2011, during a meeting of the four Chiefs of Defence Forces in Kisangani, the Armed Forces of DRC (FARDC) Chief of Staff General Etumba withdrew permission for the UPDF to operate in Congolese territory even for purposes of hot pursuit (AU document 30.9.2011).

With the expulsion of the UPDF from DRC and the LRA spreading across an area larger than California, states requested AU assistance. On 22 November 2011, the AU PSC authorised the creation of the RCI-LRA with a 5,000 strong Regional Task Force (RTF) composed of troops from the affected countries (PSC 22.11.2011). To provide strategic guidance to the RCI-LRA, the PSC created the Joint Coordination Mechanism (JCM) composed of the Chiefs of Defence Forces. The RCI-LRA's objective was to 'strengthen the operational capabilities of the countries affected by the atrocities of the LRA' and to stabilise the affected areas (PSC 22.11.2011). This model maintained the primary goal of the existing multilateral security arrangement to defeat the LRA militarily while allowing states to operate as they had previously.

The AU mission support plan was limited to financing the running costs of the JCM and the small RTF headquarters in Yambio, South Sudan (PSC 22.11.2011, 22.5.2012). All operational costs associated with the RTF's four combat units were to be covered by the TCCs. As a result, although the AU RTF Force Commander was granted operational control over the force, soldiers in each battle group would be paid for and equipped by their own governments. Also, with the exception of the UPDF's ongoing operations in South Sudan and CAR, battle groups operated within their own territory.

This formula created a paradoxical situation where the paymaster was divorced from the operational commander. The AU did its best to solicit funds, even convening a high-level donor's meeting in April 2013, but was unable to secure additional financing for TCCs. As a result of the AU's weak financial backing, each RTF partner has operated with little

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tactical oversight from the RTF Commander even after each TCC subsumed its military under the RTF in 2012 (AU 2012). And although the AU was initially important politically, its minimal presence on the ground meant that TCCs operated according to standing orders rather than through regular tactical coordination through the AU headquarters.

This is not to say TCCs operate entirely on a shoestring. Before the RTF, the US military had played a limited role in supporting the UPDF counterinsurgency operations against the LRA in Uganda (McCormick 2016; *New York Times* 6.2.2009). This expanded substantially after May 2010 when President Obama signed the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act, which allowed the deployment of American Special Forces to enhance the operational capacities of the national forces in the pursuit of the LRA (Arieff & Ploch Blanchard 2011; State Dept. 24.3.2014). Such support, however, continues on a bilateral basis (Arieff *et al.* 2015), which bypasses AU operational oversight and therefore further severs the financial linkage between the RTF operational command and battle groups on the ground.

Both the political and operational utility of the RTF became more apparent in 2013. During this period, the Séléka rebellion took over CAR and was hostile to the UPDF, initially refusing to recognise Bozizé's arrangement with Uganda, and seeking to expel the UPDF from Central African territory (*Reuters* 3.4.2013). In this context, the AU mandate became much more important as the only remaining authority to support the continued presence of the UPDF. To ensure this, the PSC demanded that the Séléka government of Michel Djotodia comply with CAR's commitments to the RCI-LRA, adding that anyone impeding counter-LRA operations would be held accountable (PSC 17.6.2013). The AU and UN envoys also communicated this message directly to the Séléka authorities in Bangui (UN and AU officials, Addis Ababa, 4.2013).

The operational effectiveness of the RTF also grew significantly in June 2013 with the appointment of former UPDF Fifth Division Commander Brigadier General Samuel Kavuma as the new RTF commander (AU 2014a). As Kavuma had commanded UPDF forces against the LRA for years in northern Uganda, his authority and knowledge renewed momentum on the ground. With American support, Kavuma strengthened tactical cooperation between the UPDF's four battle groups, including a covert operation into the Sudanese-controlled Kafia Kingi region to destroy the LRA headquarters (LRA Crisis Tracker 2014).

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Although the UNSC never provided the RTF with a Chapter VII mandate, the Council has repeatedly issued supportive Presidential Statements endorsing the decisions of the AU PSC and commending progress made by the RCI-LRA (e.g. UNSC 14.11.2011, 19.12.2012, 29.5.2013). In addition, both the UN and AU LRA envoys regularly brief the UNSC. On a logistical level, UN support was initially only technical, provided by the UN Office to the AU (UN Official, Addis Ababa, 10·2014). However, this support increased with the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in DRC (MONUSCO) providing fuel and food for the RTF Congolese contingent. Following UNSC resolution 2211 in March 2015, the language of 'operational coordination' with the RTF was added to MONUSCO's mandate (UNSC 26.3.2015) in order to allow for joint MONUSCO-RTF operations against the LRA (US Government official 3·2015 int.).

In sum, fighting the LRA required a regional response, but a traditional PSO would have been inappropriate due to the cross-border nature of the conflict and because the LRA was operating in states with functioning governments. Though the RTF has not yet managed to bring the top LRA leadership out of the bush, it has been successful in diminishing its overall strength. In 2007, when the LRA completed regrouping in Garamba National Park, defectors reported that its fighters numbered 850, mostly Ugandans, in addition to dependents (LRA ex-combatants 10·2008 int.). In contrast, although numbers fluctuate with abductions and defections, current estimates indicate that only 100–150 fighters remain, with many in the top leadership positions eliminated (LRA Crisis Tracker 2015, 2016). And while LRA violence continues, it has fallen in the aggregate: In 2009, the number of civilians killed by the LRA numbered above 1200, a number that fell to only a handful in 2015 (LRA Crisis Tracker 2016).

For the TCCs, there are several advantages to the RTF. First, the AU does not disrupt existing multilateral arrangements but rather works to enhance them by formalising the coordination structures and providing strategic level decision-making processes, with limited oversight from AU or UN actors. Second, the Task Force structure lends a degree of legality to state military actions. The UPDF is permitted to legitimately hunt the LRA beyond its borders, even against the wishes of CAR. Third, although TCCs are expected to self-fund, the Task Force structure has provided them with access to bilateral military support from a strong international ally, which also bolsters the legitimacy of African governments more broadly, a benefit that should not be overlooked, especially in combination with their ability to pursue national strategies with minimal interference from regional command structures.

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Fighting Boko Haram

Boko Haram is currently the largest insurgency in Africa.[4] It has caused over 26,000 deaths since 2009 (Council on Foreign Relations 2015) and the displacement of over 2.1 million in Nigeria alone, with 2·6 million displaced in the Lake Chad Basin region and 9·2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance regionally (UN OCHA 2016).

Boko Haram began in 2002 when Mohammed Yusuf founded the *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad* (the Group of the People of Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad) in Borno State. Although the group espoused radical views, it became militant only after Nigerian security forces killed Yusuf in July 2009 (ICG 2010: 13). Under the leadership of Yusuf's deputy, Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram emerged as a highly flexible, adaptive insurgency, which has cyclically gained and lost territory while conducting increasingly sophisticated bombings against soft targets, including the UN office in Abuja in 2011.

As the violence intensified in 2011, the Nigerian government imposed a state of emergency in the North. Still, attacks increased: the first three weeks of 2012 produced more than half of the killings of the preceding year (Human Rights Watch 2012) and by mid-2014, the group controlled 50,000 km² in and around Borno state (*The Telegraph* 10.1.2015). In 2013, Boko Haram kidnapped foreigners in Cameroon and skirmished with Nigerien forces along the border (Bureau of Counterterrorism 2014). As a regionalised problem, dealing with Boko Haram required increased participation of Nigeria's neighbours.

Operating from the region's porous borderlands, Boko Haram reportedly established relationships with other Islamist groups in Africa including Mali's Ansar Dine, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and its splinter group the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) (ICG 2010; Zenn 2013). These links have given Boko Haram access to weapons, including those made available from Libya's collapse. The group sent 'diplomats' throughout the region and to Saudi Arabia (Zenn 2013) and further solidified its global jihadist credentials in March 2015 when its leadership pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) (*AFP* 12.3.2015; *New York Times* 10.6.2015).

While Boko Haram's grievances are linked to corruption, high unemployment, poor education, and economic marginalisation, these have not been articulated in public statements. Further, though the Kanuri ethnic group represents the bulk of Boko Haram and inhabits areas in northern Nigeria where sectarian violence has occurred since independence (ICG 2010; Mitz 1991), there is no rhetoric rooted in

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self-determination. Instead, the insurgency seeks to establish an Islamic state (Thurston 2016), making its objectives irreconcilable with those of the Nigerian government and therefore not amenable to political negotiation. The Nigerian army's use of armed vigilantes has further alienated northern Nigeria and undermined dialogue (ICG 2014). But while Boko Haram reflects the contours of northern Nigeria's socio-politics, its reactionary strain of anti-state, anti-secular Muslim revivalism, coupled with the character of its external relations, pose a distinct regional threat (Abimbola 2010) requiring a regional military response.

The Multinational Joint Task Force

The path towards regional cooperation against Boko Haram began in 1998 with the creation of a Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) between Nigeria, Chad and Niger. Located in Borno State, this first iteration of the MNJTF was restricted to managing cross-border crime in the Lake Chad region (*News Express* 5.1.2015). When Boko Haram emerged, the MNJTF's mandate expanded to include counterterrorism operations. The operational capacity of the MNJTF, however, was severely limited and riddled with logistical problems. Boko Haram exposed these weaknesses on 3 January 2015, when the group overran the MNJTF headquarters, and probably massacred hundreds to thousands of people (Amnesty International 2015). As a result of the attack, Chad and Niger withdrew from the MNJTF (*News Express* 7.1.2015; *ABC News* 6.1.2015).

With the dissolution of the first MNJTF, the region tried alternative bilateral security arrangements. Chad arranged joint operations into Cameroon and on 4 February 2015, Chadian forces moved into Nigeria for a major encounter with Boko Haram (*BBC* 4.2.2015). The insurgency, however, remained undeterred, attacking the joint Chadian and Cameroon forces in Fotokol, Cameroon (*News 24* 5.1.2015), and launching an amphibious assault into Chad on 13 February (*Al Jazeera* 14.2.2015). Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan, who had resisted previous efforts to involve the AU, and who was preparing for national elections, reconsidered Nigeria's options: The sub-region required a new operational framework under which to realign neighbouring state militaries against a common enemy.

On 20 January 2015, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence of the affected states (plus Benin) met in Niamey and requested that the AU create a new MNJTF (AU 2015a; PSC 3.3.2015). On January 29, the PSC authorised this Task Force with a size of up to 7,500 (PSC

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29.1.2015), though it quickly increased this to 10,000 within two months (PSC 3.3.2015; Institute of Security Studies 2015). Unlike the RTF, whose operational space was left deliberately vague, the MNJTF defined the territory in which the Task Force could operate. Outside of this area, any operations against Boko Haram would not fall under the MNJTF mandate.[5]

Another major difference between the RTF and the MNJTF is the mediating role that the LCBC plays. While both the RTF and MNJTF have a JCM that brings together the Chiefs of Defence Forces and Ministers of Defence to provide strategic guidance and oversight, AU control over the MNJTF is more tenuous than in the case of the RTF because the LCBC bears the primary responsibility for it (PSC 3.3.2015). The LCBC Secretariat is expected to make decisions in consultation with the AU, but the MNJTF is headquartered at the LCBC Secretariat in N'Djamena, and under its direct control (PSC 3.3.2015).

As with the RTF, states involved the AU in order to create a politically acceptable framework under which to operate and acquire additional resources. In this regard, however, the MNJTF's relationship with the UN is quite different. In the RTF case, the UNSC's endorsement of the PSC mandate came in the form of a Presidential Statement. With the MNJTF, however, the original intention of the AU and TCCs was to seek a full UN Chapter VII mandate (PSC 25.11.2014; 29.1.2015; 3.3.2015). This was probably due to the belief that a Chapter VII mandate would provide the coalition with greater legitimacy and increased access to resources. By March 2015, however, Nigeria drew back from this idea. Unlike the PSC, in its Communiqués up to March 3, which urged the UNSC to adopt a resolution placing the MNJTF under a Chapter VII mandate (e.g. PSC 3.3.2015, para. 20), Nigeria's official Press Statements spoke only of seeking an endorsement, indicating Abuja's reluctance to be subject to UN operational supervision (AU 27.4.2015). This set them at odds with Chad, which had written a draft Presidential Statement for UNSC endorsement that included language on a Chapter VII mandate (What's in Blue 2015). After much back and forth between the MNJTF countries and the three African members of the UNSC, the Presidential Statement released on 28 July 2015 simply expressed support for the MNJTF, called upon it to respect human rights and humanitarian law, and asked for UN member states to provide financial support (What's in Blue 2015).[6]

Finally, funding for the MNJTF has been bilateral (the preferred method for the USA and France) and through an AU African Peace Facility, for which the EU was the most significant contributor (PSC

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26.11.2015). This support has the potential additional impact of reinforcing domestic political authority in Cameroon and Chad. While Western leaders praise Presidents Biya and Déby offering training and support in the fight against Boko Haram, the fact that the TCCs maintained control over their forces may allow these governments to enhance their capacity and legitimacy.

The MNJTF case shows how TCCs created a mechanism that offers distinct advantages in the fight against a common enemy. It allowed Nigeria the ability to maintain a more effective and durable coalition with its neighbours to fight Boko Haram than when the MNJTF was managed by the LCBC alone. At the same time, this new iteration did not bind the TCCs to an AU or UN mandate that would subject their militaries to greater oversight and operational control. It also allowed the TCCs to solicit additional funding and military training and garnered political good will from the international community, which in turn benefitted from the TCCs bearing the majority of the operational and political costs associated with a sustained counter-insurgency operation.

The MNJTF appears to have contributed to reducing the threat posed by Boko Haram. Since January 2015 when the AU authorised it, Boko Haram has lost control over territory in northern Nigeria and has been reduced to operating from small pockets in Borno State. In December 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari stated that the group had been 'technically defeated' (*BBC* 24.12.2015). This statement appears to be corroborated insofar as Boko Haram now appears unable to mount operations against regional military forces as it did between 2011 and 2015 and is limited to asymmetrical operations (ICG 2016).

One remaining challenge is that while both the AU and UN strongly urged that the fight against Boko Haram follow the strictures of humanitarian law, this has not always been the case (Human Rights Watch 2015). And since these regional and international organisations have less control over the Task Force than they would have under a traditional PSO mandate, it is much more difficult to ensure that the rules of engagement are followed.

CONCLUSION

The AU Task Forces, although *ad hoc* in nature and not specifically identified within Africa's collective security architecture, are distinct and effective responses to the changing nature of conflict in Africa, particularly the emergence of transnational insurgencies. AU Task Force

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structures have significant differences to that of traditional AU PSOs, but they fall within the APSA framework and are a practical, cost-effective solution to Africa's contemporary threats. The advantage of the Task Force is its flexibility and capacity to maintain the political commitment of TCCs to joint military operations against a common enemy in a manner that contains the threat and prevents it from damaging regional relations. These features make the Task Force an attractive option to both African governments as well as the AU.

Despite the positive elements of the Task Force, there are some challenges as the case studies show. First, though the Task Force sits within a broader regional cooperation and reconstruction mandate, it tends to focus on a military solution. While this is understandable given the security threats posed by the LRA and Boko Haram, the AU should also consider the broader economic and social needs as security concerns in each region.[7] Second, even though TCCs will need to maintain a high degree of control over their forces during counter insurgency operations, it will be important to preserve a sufficient degree of AU and UN oversight over the operations so that the mandate provided to them is not used to legitimate possible abuses of power. Finally, given the changing nature of warfare in Africa, it is also appropriate to think about the consequences of the Task Force model on the APSA over the long term. It is possible that the ASF and a Task Force could be used against radically different types of threats. In this case, the Task Force construct broadens and strengthens the available regional security responses. However, it is also conceivable that countries faced with an insurgency could request the formation of a Task Force rather than allow a traditional PSO on their soil, which would deprive them of control. The PSC must deal carefully with this sort of strategic consideration as requests for authorisations may increase in the future.

NOTES

1. The major AU PSOs include AMIB, AMIS, AMISOM, Operation Restore Democracy, AFISMA and MISCA. The AU has also authorised smaller missions in the Comoros (AMISEC and MAES).

2. These are South Africa, Algeria, Angola, Uganda, Tanzania, Niger, Chad, Liberia, Senegal and Sudan.

3. At first glance, these new threats reflect the 'new wars' literature, which situates modern insurgents at the juncture of state weakness, globalisation and privatised violence (Kaldor 2001; Duffield 2002). While this approach captures key aspects of Boko Haram and the LRA, we do not make any causal claims about these changes *per se*. We also follow Kalyvas' critique of the distinction between 'new wars' and 'old wars', which rests on uncritical assumptions and incomplete data (Kalyvas 2001).

4. For a more comprehensive history of Boko Haram, see Comolli (2015) and Smith (2015).

5. Part of the reason for this territorial specificity was to meet conditions set by the EU African Peace Facility to access their funds.

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6. Nigeria's interest in a more autonomous Task Force coincided with its advances against Boko Haram, including the retaking of Baga, Monguno and Marte in early February 2015 (*BBC* 21.2.2015), as well as the acquisition of attack helicopters from Russia (*ThisDay Live* 23.2.2015). In addition, the transition from Jonathan to Buhari opened space for more autonomous action.

7. The AU may have initiated a solution to the RCI-LRA, with the PSC deciding to have the AU Commission 'develop a vision, strategy and plan of action for the stabilization, recovery and rehabilitation of the [LRA] affected areas' in coordination with partners (PSC 18.5.2015).

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X17000040 Published online by Cambridge University Press