



# Hybrid Peacekeeping - A Deeper Understanding of Evolving Peacekeeping Practices

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**Hybrid peacekeeping has appeared as the new term to describe the modular, multi-actor composite of modern peace operations. But the term and its implications are not fully understood by many.**

### Understanding the concept of hybrid peacekeeping operations

Peace operations have evolved over the past two decades in a way that has fundamentally changed their structure. On the one hand, the sheer demand for peacekeeping operations and the difficulty the United Nations (UN) had in handling them led to an increased focus on regional organisations to maintain peace. This multidimensional approach implies a wide range of military and civilian activities across the conflict management spectrum, and brings together various institutions in parallel, support, or even joint peacekeeping and peacebuilding programs. Hybridity has appeared as **the new term** to describe these modular, multi-actor operations.

The term and its implications of this new phenomenon are, however, not fully understood by scholars. Scholars often simplify and equate ‘hybrid’ operations to peace operations involving the UN working in conjunction with at least one regional organisation; or it is understood as a collaboration of multiple military contributors with a common purpose (for instance the multinational collaboration against the Islamic State in Syria). In reality, the term implies a much more complex arrangement among various contributing actors.

Fundamentally, a hybrid peace operation alludes to a technical description of an agreement of cooperation between two or more organisations providing

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resources to a peacekeeping mission, but which has independent reporting as well as command and control lines to each of the contributing organisations. In this regard, ‘hybrid’ missions are distinct from ‘co-deployment’ or ‘joint (multinational) operations’. In the case of co-deployment, there exists a separate strategic authority, as well as command and control, while in the case of joint operations there is more integration of operational command and control resources. The United Nations – African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), Sudan was accepted to be the first peacekeeping mission with such a unique hybrid character and was defined as:

**“ “A combined/joint operation in a particular area of responsibility conducted by forces from different organisations (in this case the United Nations and AU) under a common command and control arrangement, for the purposes of achieving a common objective or end state, with each force retaining its organisation’s identity throughout the operation.” ”**

The differences between a joint or multinational operation and a hybrid operation thus lie in the degree to which the participating organisations can retain their identity and the locus of control of the operational command.

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## The prime example of UNAMID

In the case of UNAMID, it became evident that the hybrid character was the result of a compromise for both the African Union (AU) and the international community. The AU had not the resources nor the capacity to intervene on a large scale in Darfur, and the international community did not have the legal framework or political legitimacy to *intervene by itself*. Since the UN could not address the Darfur conflict on its own, the AU as an institution provided admission to an inaccessible sovereign area with *the promise* of a more soothing political relationship with a hostile government.

UNAMID, however, still suffered a broken relationship with the Government of Sudan (GoS), which hampered its deployment and capabilities severely. The unwillingness of the GoS to accept a UN-led 'hybrid force' in Darfur was largely attributed by some to the United States (US) and of its European allies being rather too keen in dealing with the situation in Darfur. Even Lakhdar Brahimi *warned that* 'the UN's global credibility is suffering because it is seen to be heavily influenced by Washington, and is almost always biased in favour of the interests of Western countries – to the detriment of the developing world'. This observation leads to the next point in understanding the *raison d'être* for hybrid operations.

## The effectiveness of the 'hybrid' model

Essentially, hybrid operations are a tool used to achieve political goals rather than a model pursued for its military or operational effectiveness. To understand this point, it should be noted that the concept of 'hybrid peace' has been introduced to describe the kind of peace that is established in post-conflict settings as a result of the interplay between external and local actors.

‘External actors’ in this sense are not only those actors involved in the peacekeeping operation nor are ‘local actors’ restricted solely to those involved in the conflict.

Local actors within the broader context include regional powers or organisations, while external actors could also point to world powers or former colonial powers which have vested interests in the peacekeeping operation. To explain the significance of this, it should be noted that UN peacekeeping is traditionally underpinned by three key principles: consent, impartiality, and the non-use of force. UN peacekeeping operations are meant to be deployed with the consent of the main parties to the conflict which distinguishes them from enforcement operations. (Hence the reason why the UN could not go into Darfur on its own).

While UN peace operations as a rule have a single-state mandate, the conflict in Mali, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Central African Republic (CAR), Sudan, and South Sudan, to mention only a few, are all regional conflicts. Their neighbouring states are part of the conflict dynamics. However, prohibition against deployment to areas where states have interests is now changing. UN operations increasingly rely on regional contributions, not only because highly interested states are willing to risk the lives of their troops in increasingly robust operations, but also because regional states are interested in conflicts that affect their security and political interests.

A key example of this development is the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which through incorporating the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) became ostensibly a mission composed of regional troops. Essentially, this means that peacekeepers are now often protecting states. In addition, new

more robust peace operation mandates present a qualitative shift, moving from defensive toward offensive use of force.

The UN is not only using force to protect the peace agreement, civilians, or itself – all established reasons for the use of force – but also to protect and assist the host state and its government. In this respect, the intervention brigade in the DRC is particularly noteworthy. While past operations could use force to protect their mandates, the use of force is now an **important part** of the mandate itself. The lack of resources available to regional organisations allows the interplay between the broader defined internal and external actors.

The US has been overly willing to provide resources and training for instance to AMISOM, while France has been actively supporting peace operations in their former colonies such as Mali and the CAR. **Critics argue** that some peacekeeping missions have provided the opportunity for former colonial powers to interfere in the internal affairs of their former colonies, especially against unpopular governments, using newly adopted controversial norms of intervention in international affairs such as the concept ‘responsibility to protect’. The interplay between these ‘local actors’ and ‘external actors’ underscores that ‘hybrid peacekeeping’ has become nothing more than a euphemism “peacekeeping for the advancement of the interests of local and external actors through enforcement operations”.

Though equal collaboration between the UN and a regional organisation may seem good on paper, it is not necessarily more effective in achieving peace. It could be argued that regional organisations in peacekeeping operations may offer an advantage of being a more homogeneous group, which lends itself to a greater capacity for consensus on regional issues and can help lend the actual peacekeeping force’s greater legitimacy.

However, in reality, regional organisations often lack operational resources and are often controlled by the regional hegemonic power. This could lead to the interests of the regional hegemonic power playing a heftier role in the peacekeeping process than necessary. As a result, pairing with a regional organisation may actually negate the neutrality often required in fragile peacekeeping operations which further undermines the initial purpose to attain greater operational legitimacy.

## Conclusion

Hybrid operations should thus be seen within the evolving context of the changing peacekeeping environment. Peacekeeping has evolved from a means to ease tensions and help resolve conflicts between states by deploying unarmed or lightly armed military personnel from a number of countries, under UN command, between the armed forces of the former warring parties (traditional peacekeeping) to larger and more complex UN peacekeeping missions (multi-dimensional peacekeeping). These missions aim to help implement comprehensive peace agreements between protagonists in intrastate conflicts. But its latest iteration, hybrid peacekeeping, is even more complex, involving many levels of interaction and reporting lines among internal and external actors who seemingly support enforcement operations for self-centred (political) reasons.

Hybrid peacekeeping therefore provides more political sway to actors (states or regional organisations) which ordinarily would not have much influence on the matter. This is the real success of the hybrid model and it is unlikely that this model would be changed despite its operational complexities and less than optimal success rate. The number of hybrid operations are therefore more than likely to proliferate in the future.

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Image credit: [Albert Gonzalez Farran, UNAMID/Flickr](#).

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