

3. Multilateral peace operations

Overview

This chapter describes general developments and trends in multilateral peace operations in 2023. There were 63 active peace operations in 2023—one less than in the previous year (see sections I and II). Three new operations started in 2023: the European Union (EU) Mission in Armenia (EUMA); the EU Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova (EUPM Moldova); and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC). Four closed in 2023: the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA); the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS); the East African Community Regional Force in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (EACRF-DRC); and the African Union (AU) Military Observer Mission to the Central African Republic (MOUACA).

There were also three multilateral peace operations that were not formally terminated but became effectively redundant in 2023: the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office on the Conflict Dealt with by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Conference (PRCIO) in Azerbaijan; the Russian–Turkish Joint Monitoring Centre (RTJMC) in Azerbaijan; and the EU Capacity Building Mission in Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger).

The number of personnel deployed to multilateral peace operations globally decreased in 2023. The number of personnel in place as of December 2023 was 13 per cent lower compared to December 2022. This marked the most significant decrease and the lowest figure in the period 2014–23. The overall decrease in personnel numbers can primarily be attributed to reductions in sub-Saharan Africa, where most peace operation personnel are deployed. Despite a reduction in the number of personnel deployed to peace operations in sub-Saharan Africa, the region still hosts most of these deployments. All of the top 10 troop-contributing countries were from either Asia or sub-Saharan Africa.

The UN remains the main organization deploying multilateral peace operations, accounting for about one-third of all operations and 67 per cent of all personnel deployed as of December 2023. However, most peace operations were deployed by regional organizations and alliances, which led 38 multilateral peace operations in 2023—the same number as in 2022. Ad hoc coalitions of states conducted five multilateral peace operations in 2023, which was one less than in 2022.

In 2023 the landscape of multilateral peace operations experienced a continuation of notable shifts, which reflected broader geopolitical tensions and evolving conflict management strategies (see section III). Amid these changes, political consensus on managing armed conflicts has become increasingly elusive, as agreement on new operations or mandate adjustments has been difficult to reach in the UN Security Council and in the AU Peace and Security Council. This discord is set against a backdrop of growing dissatisfaction with peace operations, prompting discussions among donor countries, host governments and financial contributors about the effectiveness and value of these missions. Additionally, the shift away from UN-led operations towards regional initiatives, as evidenced by newly established operations deployed by regional organizations, may be challenged by the ongoing polarization and lack of consensus in these regional forums. The rise of private military companies and bilateral operations as alternative conflict management solutions suggests the fragmentation of conflict management is already under way. It also indicates a trend towards the further militarization and securitization of peace efforts, potentially reshaping the multilateral peace operations landscape significantly.

Table 3.2 in section IV provides more information about the different multilateral peace operations and the organizations and alliances deploying them.

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