

# Peace Operations Under the COVID-19 Pandemic: a comparative analysis of UN, EU and AU responses

## Operações de Paz durante a Pandemia da COVID-19: uma análise comparativa das respostas da ONU, da UE e da UA

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SERGIO AGUILAR

### INTRODUCTION

Critical events have a profound effect on organisations and how they manage crises. On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared a global pandemic following the alarming spread and severity of the Coronavirus disease (Covid-19), which posed unprecedented challenges worldwide. Beyond the immediate issues relating to health, peace and security emerged as significant areas that required sustained and enhanced multilateral action in the new context, including peace operations and missions deployed in conflict-prone environments. The Covid-19 pandemic impacted peace operations and missions in multiple ways. For the purposes of this study, the terms ‘peace operations/missions’ and ‘peacekeeping’ are applied interchangeably with terms such as the EU’s ‘crisis management’ and the AU’s ‘peace support’.

During the pandemic, articles highlighted the immediate challenges posed by the outbreak to United Nations (UN) operations (Coleman 2021), including the role of peacekeepers (Arif 2021), the UN Security Council (Mbombo 2022), guidance from the UN Secretariat (Rashkow 2020), and peacekeeping response to epidemics and pandemics (Caparini 2022). Studies addressed the effects of the pandemic on European Union (EU) security and defence (Meyer et al. 2020), and its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations (Pietz 2021). Others pre-

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**Sergio Aguilar** é professor titular da Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita Filho (Unesp) — Campus de Marília/SP. Coordenador do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Relações Internacionais San Tiago Dantas (Unesp-Unicamp-PUC/SP). Realizou pós-doutorado no Departamento de Política e Relações Internacionais da Universidade de Oxford — Reino Unido. É bolsista de produtividade em pesquisa do CNPq. Orcid.org/0000-0003-4757-4426. E-mail: sergio.aguilar@unesp.br.

sented the impact of Covid19 on peace and security (Amani Africa 2020) and peace operations (Coning 2020) in Africa, and on the distribution of resources of the international community to peacebuilding (Gordon 2023). Challenges to peace processes and global armed conflicts were addressed by Dicker and Paterson (2020) and Mehrl and Thurner (2021) respectively. Studies also targeted organisations such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Meier and Martens 2024), and compared the EU's integrated approach to the UN, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) policies (Debuysere and Blockmans 2021). Regarding exogenous shocks and crisis management, studies focused on contingency theory and organisations' performance (Donaldson 2001), socioeconomic systems (Hynes et al. 2020), public and private sectors through resilience lens (Keenan 2020), supply chains (Ivanov 2020), and businesses reaction (Pantano et al. 2020; Soluk 2022), among others.

Innovatively, this paper addresses three key players in peacekeeping operations, the UN, the EU, and the African Union (AU) bridging insights of peace and conflicts, and risk and crisis management, in relation to the more specific threat of the pandemic. It examines how these organisations handled with their peace operations and missions during the crisis. Since organisations' decisions and directives issued at the political-strategic level are materialised through practices on the ground, the paper distils a set of each organisation's deliberations, strategic choices and practices at operational level. The temporal scope of this research begins in March 2020, when the WHO officially declared the Covid-19 a pandemic, and ends in May 2023, when the same organisation declared the pandemic over (WHO 2023). Although crisis management studies tend to focus on the transition from response to recovery, this paper concentrates exclusively on the response phase. It does not aim to generalise its conclusions, rather, to provide useful insights for future research on the subject.

I argue, that decisions concerning peace operations and missions were shaped by how international governmental organisations (IGOs) positioned them in relation to other priorities during the pandemic, that varying timelines in how first made sense of the pandemic were connected to the characteristics of their decision-making processes, and that different effects of the pandemic on the ground were linked to the way each organisation conducts its operations and missions.

The paper is divided into four parts: the first presents the conceptual and theoretical framework used to identify the key factors employed in the analysis; the second focuses on methods and data; the third presents the cases; and the fourth discusses the key findings. A final section concludes.

## CRISES, SENSE-MAKING, DECISION-MAKING, AND THE COVID-19

IGOs “have been and will inevitably continue to be exposed to external shocks”, conceptualised as “a period of prolonged and widespread crisis in which actors struggle to reconstitute all aspects of social life” (Soluk 2022, 794). External shocks tend to weaken IGO and governmental abilities to accomplish their tasks.

The pandemic displayed certain distinctive traits, including the dramatic impact on public health and businesses, the collapse of multiple supply chains (both health-related and otherwise), which threatened human survival, the near-paralysation of global trade, and the exceptionally high levels of unemployment (ILO 2021; Ivanov 2020; Pantano et al. 2020; WTO 2020). Moreover, the pandemic led to the “collapse of global cooperation [when] governments pursued ad hoc, uncoordinated and even competitive measures to control Covid-19” (Jones and Hameiri 2022, 2,057). It also resulted in the reduced resilience of key systems, and provoked failures that cascaded from one system to others (Hynes et al. 2020). The external shocks induced by the Covid-19 pandemic required IGOs, governments and citizens alike to shift their attention and reallocate resources, adapting behaviour for preservation and survival.

Organisational functions and performance are a product of internal capabilities, as are the interactions between organisations and the environments in which they operate (see e.g. Aldrich 1979; Donaldson 2001; Miles and Snow 1978). In this way, and even more so during uncertainties, decisions involve “understanding the particular context of each case and pursuing limited objectives while trying to balance the competing requirements of power and principles” (Davis 2009, 109).

Peace operations and missions entail direct engagement between the institutional counterparts of states facing severe security problems. Among several other issues, interventions encompass developing and funding projects that strengthen host states’ capacity to govern (e.g. processes for solving social and political problems and providing public services) and guarantee the security of the state and its citizens. However, IGOs suffer from a serious “contradiction between the dependence on domestic state apparatuses for implementation [of governance] and the continued hollowing out of state and IO capacities” (Jones and Hameiri 2022, 2064). This contradiction most likely became more prevalent during the pandemic, since it provoked a certain level of distraction from conflict; reports were reduced, and aid programmes were postponed or cancelled, potentially increasing the insecurity and grievances that escalate tensions (Gordon 2023).

Crises create a context of uncertainty, in which decisions need to be made quickly. It lead to the concept of responsiveness, “the sensitivity of an IO’s policymaking to a shift in the severity of a policy problem within a given period of time” (Lundgren et al. 2023, 3). This conceptualisation of responsiveness encompasses three components: the severity of the problem that the IGO sets out to mitigate; the policy response (output); and the reaction time (Lundgren et al. 2023).

Meier and Martens’ model for analysing IGO crisis management comprises four stages, among which the first two relate to sense-making (the recognition of a threat as a looming crisis) and decision-making (reactions to the crisis) (Meier and Martens 2024). Sense-making and decision-making are both shaped by the relative autonomy of organisational bodies as they prepare for and decide upon actions, which together determine the speed, scope and duration of implementation (Debuysere and Blockmans 2021).

In performing their roles but also responding to crises, organisations produce policy programmes and implement operational and informational activities (Rittberger et al. 2012; Archer 2015; Debre and Dijkstra 2021). However, in the context of peacekeeping, the tangible impact on human well-being — or the failure to achieve it — will ultimately occur at the host country level. The implementation (or not) of directives ultimately depends on local socio-political power relations (Jones and Hameiri 2022), i.e. despite the efforts of headquarters, the outcomes of their decisions depend on the capacity of the peace operations and missions to implement them, as well as the dynamics in which they are deployed, including local resistance.

From the highlights above, some factors were selected and observed in the analysis. They are detailed in the following section.

## METHODOLOGY, DATA AND ANALYTICAL PROCESS

To understand IGOs’ ability to deal with peacekeeping during the pandemic, this study focuses on the decisions on peace operations and missions that were explicitly formulated in response to the Covid-19 crisis, as well as their practical, on-the-ground implementation. When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, the UN had 13 peace operations deployed worldwide, while the EU was carrying out 19 operations and missions under its CSDP, and the AU had five (ZIF 2020).

These organisations were chosen, first, because they are multi-issue organisations with extensive policy agendas and a range of concerns, including peace and security; and, second, because they were jointly responsible for the majority of operations and missions addressing security and

governance in 2020. While the UN operates globally, AU focuses on its own regional conflicts, and the EU combines acting within and outside the block. Moreover, institutional *modus operandi* did not change during the pandemic. Thus, these aspects make the organisations comparable. In addition, they are revelatory and representative cases for analysing whether, and if so, to what extent, IGOs reframed peace operations amidst new priorities, and how the operations and missions were influenced by the severity of the pandemic.

I compare the actions taking by the organisations through the concept of responsiveness, which in this paper encompasses the speed of reaction and response to the crisis (outputs). I understand that both decisions and practices serve as indicators of IGO performance. Initially, I confirmed the amount of time it took for the organisations to decide on peacekeeping at political/strategic level. Speed was measured due to the fact that the quicker an IGO responds, the greater its ability to enact operations/missions on the ground.

In the context of the pandemic, ‘policy outputs’ refers to the ‘products’ generated by organisations (policy programmes, and operational and informational activities), through the IGO’s headquarter, and at the operational level, in terms of what took place on the ground. The decisions of each organisation’s main body indicates both its intended purpose (how it sought to act) and the practical dimensions tasks at hand. While within IGOs, policies and directives are established by the main decision-making body through collective decision-making, departments and offices of the secretariat exercise varying degrees of authority. As such, I engage relevant documentation to map the policy programmes (resolutions, regulations, directives, instruments, etc.) adopted by each IGO’s principal decision-making body, as well as the key entities directly involved in (and responsible for) the operations/missions. I also listed information activities employed to respond to the pandemic in each case.

Since programmes and information in peacekeeping are implemented through operational activities, I identified how peace operations and missions performed on the ground. I do not aim to evaluate the outcomes, but rather, to shed light on how operations and missions adapted to the challenges provoked by the pandemic. The focus lies on mapping the range of decisions made, their corresponding outputs, and field activities. Special attention was devoted to the new tasks assigned to operations and missions, particularly those targeting the domestic audiences of host countries. Data were collected from organisational reports as well as secondary sources. In the field of peace operations, there are always limitations in obtaining data. Most of the reports on operations are classified and do not

allow public access. Despite this, the available data enabled to achieve the objective of the study.

Consequently, I first provide a broader description of how the IGOs addressed the pandemic. Next, based on the empirical findings, I compare UN, EU and AU through two major threads: sense-making, the time elapsed between inputs and outputs; and decision-making, the outputs that arose from the crisis at political-strategic and operational levels. Through a reflection on the various decisions and practices identified, the paper then discusses the selected IGOs' performance on peace operations and missions during the pandemic.

## THE CASES

In relation to peacekeeping, in 2020, the UN had 87,952 personnel deployed, the EU 3,870, and the AU 19,378 (ZIF 2020). This section describes how the pandemic was recognised by threat by each organisation, and how they reacted in terms of decisions and practices at political/strategic and operational levels.

### United Nations

At the beginning of 2020, amidst 13 other UN peacekeeping operations deployed in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East (UN 2020f), the Hybrid Operation in Darfur found itself downsizing, and in December 2020, it was closed down.

At the political level no resolution on Covid-19 was issued until July 2020. The UN Security Council (UNSC) initially postponed all mandate renewals when the pandemic hit (Coning 2020). After the WHO officially declared the Covid-19 outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020, no discussions related to the health crisis were planned (SCR 2020a). Even in March, after the WHO declared the global pandemic, the UNSC's failure to discuss Covid-19 continued. When Estonia proposed greater international cooperation against the pandemic, China, as UNSC President, blocked the initiative, on the grounds that there were other institutions better suited to dealing with the issue, and that public health did not fall within the scope of the UNSC (Mbombo 2022). While the US pushed for a resolution, implicating China, where the pandemic originated, China maintained their position based on sovereign immunity against such processes. When then-US President Donald Trump called Covid-19 a "Chinese virus", Beijing accused Washington of politicising the pandemic to cover up its own ineffective response. It was

only two months later that a Franco-Tunisian draft resolution was put in blue at the UNSC (SCR 2020b). Furthermore, during the negotiations, the US suspended funding and subsequently ended its relationship with the WHO, adding a new layer to the debate (SCR 2020b). The UNSC only approved Resolution 2532 on 1 July 2020, 111 days after the WHO first declared the pandemic (UN 2020e).

At the strategic level, the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) first exercised his authority on 19 March, by establishing three critical points of action: tackling the health emergency, social impact and economic response and recovery, and the responsibility to recover (UN 2020d). On 23 March, he called for a global ceasefire (Guterres 2020a). The Secretariat proceeded to provide guidance to field missions (Guterres 2020b). From March 2020, the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) worked with ongoing operations and other departments to meet four objectives defined in response to the pandemic: to protect UN personnel and ensure they remained safe and able to continue operations; to reinforce containment and mitigation, reducing the spread of the virus; to support national authorities by collaborating on their responses; and to protect vulnerable communities (UN 2020i). Global coordination was thus established, and guidelines were developed to adapt to the evolution of the virus; risk mitigation plans were created, medical facilities were reinforced, and virtual audits of the main operations were conducted to improve health practices, resulting in a lower number of cases among peace operation staff (UN 2020i). After a temporary suspension of movement, operations resumed, albeit under strict conditions. These new measures, coupled with global restrictions, included a reduction in rotations as of July 2020 (UN 2020i). In spite of restrictions and delays, due in particular to the Delta variant, 168,618 peacekeepers were rotated between September 2020 and August 2021 (UN 2021a).

On 14 April 2020, the UN issued the Administrative Guidelines for Offices on the Novel Coronavirus Pandemic (Covid-19), which included information on alternative work arrangements, teleworking, reimbursing expenses for the cancellation/interruption of official travel, hazard pay, wearing masks and quarantine (Rashkow 2020). Specific guidelines were issued for peacekeeping operations. The DPO documented and disseminated best practices, which included communication and information tools to target and reach populations more effectively, part of wider efforts to increase community awareness of Covid-19 preparedness, prevention and response (Rashkow 2020). Departments, offices and units of the Secretariat developed response plans, maintained critical supply chains, acquired and distributed millions of pieces of protective and testing equipment (Arif

2021), and issued operational guidance to support the mitigation of the spread of Covid-19 in their specific areas.

At the operational level, rotations were frozen between March and July 2020, movements were reduced to the essential minimum, the use of online resources and remote communication intensified, and plans were adapted to refocus on the most critical tasks (Rashkow 2020; Arif 2021). A 14-day quarantine and Covid-19 testing plan for newly arrived uniformed personnel were put in place (UN 2021a). Patrols were re-oriented to maintain social distance (UN 2020c). It were introduced more flexible work arrangements, staff entitlements, rest and recuperation, mission footprint modifications and home leave (UN 2021a). Operations adopted new mechanisms under the motto ‘Protect, Help and Explain,’ which included the installation of hand-washing stations outside bases, regular temperature checks, and the temporary cancellation of community outreach programmes (Arif 2021).

News challenges arose. In the CAR, Minusca was blamed to be responsible for the outbreak, with locals derogatorily referring to Covid-19 as the ‘Minuscavirus’ (Losh 2020). In South Sudan, the confirmation of Covid-19 cases among UN personnel in April 2020 triggered a wave of violent messages on social media ignited hate speech and xenophobic rhetoric particularly directed at UN staff (Okuj and Akile 2020). In Mali, armed groups adapted their messaging to interpret the pandemic as a divine punishment against the West, aiming to increase populations’ support to them (Columbo 2020). Consequently, the operations also dedicated radio time to airing content about Covid-19, countering misinformation, delivering interactive programmes to dispel myths about the virus, providing awareness-raising materials to local radio stations, including posters and leaflets, and holding awareness-raising workshops in collaboration with local authorities and humanitarian partners.

In several operations, such as in the Central African Republic (CAR) and South Sudan, specific training, awareness-raising activities and dialogues around children’s safety and protection were postponed and interrupted, as were political and technical engagement efforts, which delayed the implementation of action plans against the recruitment and exploitation of children. The collation of reliable data on violations was also impacted, as were ongoing efforts to build supervisory structures and capacities around child protection (UN 2020j).

In general, UN peacekeeping operations were strategically adapted to local contexts, which included developing contingency plans, reprioritising activities to support domestic government efforts, and engaging with local communities to mitigate and respond to the outbreak (see UN 2020a;

UN 2020c). They also coordinated efforts between their various components (military, police and civilians).

Existing projects were reformulated, and their resources were redirected to health facilities; the operations also donated various medical and other supplies to local authorities and health facilities (UN 2020g). Limitations in formal negotiations were counterbalanced by innovative remote technology solutions (e.g. in Sudan) (Dicker and Paterson 2020). In South Sudan, Unmiss prioritised mass community sensitisation campaigns to enhance hygiene and public health in protection of civilian sites. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Monusco deployed temporary bases to protect vulnerable populations affected by intercommunal violence (UN 2020h).

### European Union

When the pandemic broke out, the EU was conducting 19 overseas missions and operations (EU 2021). EU decision-making involves deliberations across their various institutions and requires approval at different levels, and several entities are involved in EU crisis management. Both the EU's key civilian and military crisis management bodies, and the intergovernmental committees involved in the CSDP, are hosted under the European External Action Service (EEAS) (Duke 2016). Missions and operations are controlled, directed and coordinated by the Political and Security Committee (PSC), which takes relevant decisions concerning the operations authorised by the Council of the EU (EU 2012; 2024a).

At a political-strategic level, on 28 January 2020, the Croatian presidency of the Council activated the EU's integrated political crisis response mechanism (IPCR) in information sharing mode. On 2 March 2020, before the WHO declared the pandemic, the Presidency activated the IPCR in full mode (EU 2020d), instigating crisis roundtable discussions with the participation of affected member states, the European Commission, the EEAS, and other relevant EU agencies and experts to prepare, develop and update proposals for actions to be discussed and decided upon by the Council (EU 2018a).

On 3 April 2020, the EU High Representative (EUHR) declared its support for the UNSG's Appeal for a Global Ceasefire (EU 2020e). On 24 March, the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability Directorate (the operational headquarters for the civilian missions) issued a message informing that all civilian CSDP missions were to abide by local regulations and implement the internationally recommended precautionary health measures. On 6 April, it was confirmed that Operations Althea (Bosnia

Herzegovina) and Atalanta (Horn of Africa and Indian Ocean) were to continue to operate at 100% capacity (EU 2020c).

It was ordered a temporary reduction in staff on EU training missions. Quarantine periods were imposed before and after deployment, which reduced the possibility of troop rotations. By the end of June, the average deployment rate of personnel on civilian CSDP missions and the Sahel Regional Advisory and Assistance Cell stood at 48% (Meyer et al. 2020). On 16 June, the EU Foreign Affairs Council decided “to focus on CSDP re-deployment and to enhance operational engagement by [European Union Training Missions] EUTMs, based on a step-by-step approach as public health conditions allow” (UN 2020b, 7). The next day, the Council called for an “urgent return of personnel, temporarily withdrawn from the area of operation as a precautionary measure during the initial phase of the Covid-19 pandemic” (EU 2020a, 6).

In their response to the pandemic, EU priorities were to limit the spread of the virus, ensure the provision of medical equipment, promote research for treatments and vaccines, and support jobs, businesses and the economy (EU 2024b). The priorities mainly focused on actions within the EU, where they could make use of existing mechanisms as well as develop new ones. This increased the EU’s policy scope to support the areas of health and social policy, such as through innovative funding instruments, larger budgets, etc. (Debre and Dijkstra 2021). This shows how, at least initially, peacekeeping missions and operations were not part of the EU’s focus.

At the operational level, the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic led to the withdrawal of personnel from multiple missions, as well as the suspension of activities and rotations on the ground. Seconded and contracted personnel deployed in civilian missions were rapidly repatriated and between 1 March and 1 May 2020 the CSDP workforce were almost halved, bringing the implementation of mandates to a halt (Pietz 2021). The withdrawal of personnel triggered disappointment among local counterparts.

Missions temporarily adapted or reduced operational activities, while staff self-isolated and worked from home. Additional mentoring and advisory support was organised for local partners via e-mail, phone or video, when possible. Indispensable functions continued, but under the full implementation of precautionary health measures (EU 2020b). Training activities were scaled back unless they could be remotely delivered (Meyer et al. 2020). The second wave of the pandemic in Europe “led to another round of evacuations and the halting of ongoing re-staffing processes” (Pietz 2021, 2–3). On the other hand, operations EUNAVFOR Atalanta and EUNAVFOR Med Irini were only slightly impacted, although their operational headquarters functioned on a rotational shift system with re-

duced numbers (Meyer et al. 2020). Civilian missions were more markedly affected than the military operations in terms of personnel, and faced particular difficulties in delivering face-to-face advisory and training activities (Meyer et al. 2020).

Despite the initial hysteria prompted by multiple uncertainties around the virus, CSDP missions progressively found ways to keep their activities going. CSDP reports from 2021 and 2022 evidence on the ground achievements by most missions and operations (EU 2022, 2023). Patrols continued, and training sessions and strategic advice remained in place (EU 2022).

Missions and operations became the target of rumours and disinformation campaigns that blamed peacekeepers for spreading the virus. The prevailing belief among local populations that Covid-19 were brought into the country by foreigners harmed the legitimacy of the EUTMs and posed additional challenges (Pietz 2021). The EU had been tackling disinformation since 2015. A number of tools were adopted (e.g. the Action Plan against Disinformation in 2018) (EU 2018b), as well as organs were set up (e.g. the East StratCom Task Force in the EEAS). During the pandemic, the EEAS analysed the trends in disinformation and shared findings with international partners, civil society, media and expert communities. Through the ‘Team Europe’, the EU foresaw support for partners in promoting access to reliable information (EU 2020f), including the countries where the missions and operations were deployed.

### African Union

When the pandemic broke out, the AU was overseeing five missions: the AU Mission in Somalia (Amisom), the Joint Force G5 Sahel, the AU Observer Mission in Burundi (AU Burundi), the AU Mission for the CAR (Misac), and the AU Mission for Mali and the Sahel (Misahel). The organisation had 24,398 personnel deployed, 19,366 of which were with Amisom, and 5,000 of which were part of the Joint Force G5 Sahel (ZIF 2020).

At the AU’s political/strategic level, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) is responsible for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts (AU 2003). From 9 April 2020, PSC sessions were held through video calls and PSC members were unable to carry out field missions (Amani Africa 2021). The first PSC deliberation on the outbreak came on 13 February 2020, in which a statement declared the pandemic capable of constituting a threat to peace and security in the continent (AU 2020a).

On 14 April, the PSC declared that the pandemic constituted “an existential threat to international peace and security” (AU 2020b, 1). The

Council also addressed the potential risks of civil unrest due to lockdowns, the protection of vulnerable groups, and free elections, among other matters, and underlined the applicability of the African Standby Force's (ASF) capabilities to enhance efforts to deal with the pandemic (AU 2020b). However, by 27 January 2020, the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) had already activated its Emergency Operations Centre and Incident Management System for the outbreak and developed an incident action plan (AU 2020c).

The AU dedicated 2020 to 'Silencing the Guns — Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development,' aiming to overcome Covid-19 and achieve lasting peace and development (AU 2020d). Nevertheless, it was no longer possible to implement any initiatives or planned activities (Amani Africa 2020). The PSC called for an immediate halt to the fighting in Libya, as well as between armed groups across the continent, prioritising efforts to combat Covid-19 (AU 2020f). It also called for host countries to include peace operations in local health services (AU 2020g).

The implementation of peace agreements and mediations were delayed, including negotiations with armed groups in Sudan, the CAR and Libya (AU 2020h). Notwithstanding, the G5 Sahel Joint Taskforce mandate was renewed for a year beginning on 13 July 2020 (Amani Africa 2021), and the AU authorised the African Union Military Observer Mission in the Central African Republic (Mouaca) to operate from 1 September 2020 to 31 October 2022. However, its implementation suffered delays due to the pandemic (Amani Africa 2022); by October 2020, less than half of the authorised military observers had been deployed (Smit and Van der Linj 2021).

At the operational level, Covid-19 had consequences for AU troop rotations, as well as impacting "support to peace processes, patrols and activities related to protection of civilians, convoy escorts and other forms of support to humanitarian assistance, force protection, protecting key infrastructure, and support to host state institutions and local authorities" (Coning 2020).

Amisom implemented measures to contain the spread of the virus and treat those infected, with the support of equipment donated by China and Korea (AU 2020e). A multidimensional Covid-19 committee was set up with subcommittees from the military, police and civilian sectors to guide the mission in dealing with the crisis. Operational procedures were developed based on guidelines from CDC-Africa, the WHO, and the Somali government to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. A Joint Task Force (JTF) comprising Amisom and the UN coordinated activities, including regular analyses of the situation and recommendations for managing the pandemic (Amisom 2020).

Social distancing measures were adopted, screening was carried out at ports of entry that were on Amisom's watch, personal protective equipment was distributed to members of the mission, and facilities were set up to prevent the spread of the virus. Quarantine and isolation facilities were also built, hospital capacity was increased, and rapid response medical teams were established to identify cases and trace the contacts of those infected. Flexible working arrangements were designed, which allowed civilian personnel to work from their homes, as well as platforms permitted virtual works (Amisom 2020).

While the handover of security responsibilities from Amisom to Somalia security forces took place, the PSC pushed for a review of the Somalia Transitional Plan (STP), and 1,000 troops were withdrawn during 2020, in line with the agreed-upon drawdown of Amisom forces (Amani Africa 2021). There was also more general support to healthcare workers, to mitigate the mobility restrictions imposed by the pandemic (AU 2021a).

Regarding information activities, Amisom produced pamphlets, banners, posters and door stickers in the languages of the troop- and police-contributing states, which were distributed to raise awareness about prevention (Amisom 2020). Misahel, in partnership with Africa CDC, organised an information workshop on the AU's contribution to fighting the pandemic in Mali (AU 2021b).

## DISCUSSION

Peace operations and missions usually have contingency plans. However, the severity of the pandemic presented challenges that were not anticipated in these plans.

At the political/strategic level, sense-making was fast in terms of understanding of the severity of Covid-19 in all cases except the UN where UNSC decision-making was obstructed political tensions between the US and China. However, while political decisions in the UNSC were paralysed, the UNSG exercised its authority making decisions, and departments and offices of the Secretariat (e.g. the DPO and the DOS, among others) were able to issue directives to reorient peace operations towards containing the spread of the virus among peacekeepers and local communities, as well as keeping essential activities ongoing and supporting local authorities to deal with the pandemic. The case of the UN strengthens the argument that, when the main body is unable to decide, the secretariat must exercise their authority to continue directing operations on the ground. However, in the case of the UN, it was only due to the level of authority already delegated by the UNSC that the UN Secretariat and related entities were able to react in this way.

The EU has several decision-making bodies including the European Commission, European Council, Council of the EU, and European Parliament. It was perceived a joint effort to react to the pandemic evidenced in the large number of measures adopted at the very beginning of the crisis. However, the distinguishing feature of the Union was its prioritisation of activities targeting member states. The EU largely looked inward when it came to controlling the spread of the virus, providing necessary equipment and reducing the negative effect on its members. During the first months of the pandemic, decisions by key civilian and military crisis management bodies, as well as intergovernmental committees involved in missions and operations, were virtually reduced. Therefore, at the political/strategic level, despite responding quickly to the pandemic, CSDP missions and operations were not the initial focus. Only in June was attention finally drawn to the importance of enhancing operational engagements and returning personnel to the field. Difficulties in directing and keeping the missions operational were compounded by the specific way that EU CSDP missions operate. The EU depends on member states which are primarily responsible for providing their nationals and bearing the costs. The 'run of repatriation' when contributing countries brought nationals home at the beginning of the pandemic reduced mission capacities on the ground. It not happened in the case of military operations, therefore they were impacted to a lesser extent than civilian missions.

The key point regarding the AU was its prompt reaction to Covid-19, at the end of January 2020, through measures centred on the Africa CDC, and from February, through PSC declarations and decisions. The AU's main concern was the potential increase in violence provoked by both governments and armed groups. PSC declarations and announcements were mostly framed along these lines. The organisation has managed to continue to discharge its mandated tasks in the host countries.

Thus, the EU and AU cases inform that reactions varied according to where peace operations and missions were on the list of the organisation's priorities. In the case of the UN, although international peace and security being central to the UN's mission, the political differences between two permanent members did not allow for a quick decision.

Despite different reaction times and the priorities of each organisation, all sought to guide operations on the ground. As regards to informational activities, all IGOs made notable efforts to provide correct and reliable information to combat disinformation and support operational activities.

At the operational level, the suspension of rotations and official travel, quarantine, and social distance measures, among others, led to the re-

duction of activities during the initial months of the pandemic in all operations and missions. The UN was primarily concerned to prevent personnel from becoming sources of contagion. In the case of the EU, repatriation of staff and restriction on travel plans and field engagements (ICG 2020; Mehrl and Thurner 2021) practically paralysed the missions on the ground for months (Pietz 2021). However, EUNAVFOR MED Irini and EUTM Mozambique, launched on 31 March 2020 and in October 2021 respectively, indicated the EU's political will to continue its engagement abroad.

In the case of the AU, its biggest operation — Amisom, implemented measures to contain the spread of the virus, established committees and operational procedures to manage the pandemic, and maintained the existing drawdown plan after a review by the PSC. Although AU's operations and missions varied in size and characteristics, they generally kept essential activities running, coordinating with other actors and supporting local authorities and populations according to their capacities. The renewal of the G5 Sahel Joint Taskforce mandate and the establishment of Mouaca during the pandemic indicated the AU's political will to continue its engagement in African conflicts.

The pandemic required organisations to adapt their field activities and introduce new mechanisms for communication and work loading. New tasks were established, many of which were geared towards supporting local authorities and populations. After initial setbacks, operational activities were gradually resumed.

Certain operations and missions faced significant dis- (or mis-) information campaigns that attributed the spread of the virus to 'internationals' in the host countries, especially in Africa. This exacerbated challenges by directly undermining missions and operations' legitimacy, eroding local cooperation, and creating new vulnerabilities. Thus, IGO informational objectives were twofold; on the one hand, they sought to provide correct information about the virus to deal with the crisis, and on the other hand, they developed campaigns to counter dis- (or mis-) information.

Table 1 summarises the factors used in the comparison.

Table 1 — IGOs Characteristics and Responses to the Pandemic

IGO	Sense-Making	Decision-Making		
		Policy Programs	Operational Activities	Informational Activities
UN	UNSG — Mar 2020 UNSC — Jul 2020	Directives to reorient peace operations Priority to contain the spread of the virus among peacekeepers and local communities	Keep the activities ongoing according to the mandates Support authorities and communities of the host country	Provide accurate information to peacekeepers and local communities Campaigns to counter dis- (or mis-) information
EU	Jan. 2020	Decisions largely looked inward Priority to control the spread of the virus, provide equipment, and reduce the negative effect of the pandemic inside the block	Keep the activities ongoing according to the mandates	Provide accurate information to peacekeepers and local communities Campaigns to counter dis- (or mis-) information
AU	CDC — Jan. 2020 PSC — Feb. 2020	Declarations and decisions Concern about increasing violence	Keep the activities ongoing according to the mandates Support authorities and communities of the host country	Provide accurate information to peacekeepers and local communities Campaigns to counter dis- (or mis-) information

## CONCLUSION

This study drew on the concept of responsiveness which encompassed the speed of reaction and response to the crisis (outputs). Related to the speed of reaction the results were different. At the UN, the UNSC failed to address quickly peace operations, although the maintenance of international peace and security is at the core of the organisation's mandate. It happened because of disagreements between the US and China. The cases of the EU and AU illustrate how priorities set during crises affect the operations on the ground. Infamous for its slow crisis responses, the EU reacted quickly to the pandemic albeit largely looked inward the block, consequently, it faced severe setbacks on their missions abroad. The AU's traditional concern for peace and security on the continent became more

pronounced during the crisis, consequently, the organization strove to maintain essential activities running on the ground.

The Covid-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges for peace operations and missions and the outputs presented more similarities. The three organisations have developed policy programmes and operational activities. The organisations' main concerns were to preserve the health of their personnel and prevent their staff from becoming a source of contagion. The first months of the pandemic were particularly negative in terms of functionality, due to reductions and even the paralysation of activities on the ground. Overall, while peace operations and missions were negatively affected by the crisis, they adjusted strategies and operational activities, including through innovative practices, adaptive planning, use of digital technology, mainly supporting local authorities to deal with the pandemic. As regards to informational activities, mainly the UN and EU faced disinformation campaigns that affected their ability to engage with governments and the public in the host countries. Thus, it was an effort to provide accurate information in order to lessen the negative effect on the fulfilment of their tasks.

Ultimately, the pandemic provides important insights, especially for future crises provoked by exogenous shocks. First, an important issue to bear in mind when thinking of the crisis management is that of the speed responses are mobilised. Crisis management may require particular sensitivity of the main decision-making body of the organisation, and requires a common vision about the crises which is usually in conflict with prosaic members and institution political concerns. Second, that secretariats with higher levels of autonomy can compensate failures and delays in the decision-making process because of incompatibilities between members by providing guidance to the operations and missions. Third, that specific organisations' capacity to adapt (as in the case of peace operations and missions) depends on how priorities are set during the crisis. Finally, that in severe crises such as the pandemic, flexibility and adaptability are key for peacekeeping performance.

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## PEACE OPERATIONS UNDER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF UN, EU AND AU RESPONSES

### ABSTRACT

The unprecedented challenges posed by the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, in 2020, impacted the management of ongoing peace missions and operations. To understand how international governmental organisations (IGOs) balanced existing peacekeeping priorities with fulfilling their new responsibilities, induced by the pandemic, this paper asks: how did IGOs manage their peace operation and mission commitments in response to the Covid-19 pandemic? Through a qualitative approach, this paper explores comparatively how the United Nations, European Union and African Union responded to the crisis, and what accounts for the variation between them. It uses the concept of responsiveness to analyse the argument that the speed of reaction and the responses to the pandemic were designed in line with the characteristics of the decision-making process and priorities of each IGO during the crisis. Data from official documents and secondary sources are used to describe the outputs of each IGO at the political-strategic level, as well as practices relating to peacekeeping operations and missions on the ground.

**Key-words:** Covid-19; International Organisations; Peace Operations; Crisis Management.

### RESUMO

Os desafios sem precedentes provocados pela pandemia do Coronavírus (Covid-19) em 2020 afetaram a gestão das missões e operações de paz em curso. Para compreender como as organizações governamentais internacionais equilibraram as prioridades existentes em matéria de manutenção da paz com o cumprimento das suas novas responsabilidades, induzidas pela pandemia, este artigo questiona: como as organizações gerenciaram seus compromissos em matéria de operações e missões de paz em resposta à pandemia da Covid-19? Por meio de uma abordagem qualitativa, o artigo explora comparativamente como as Nações Unidas, a União Europeia e a União Africana responderam à crise e o que explica a variação entre elas. Utiliza o conceito de 'capacidade de resposta' para analisar o argumento que a rapidez da reação e as respostas à pandemia foram concebidas em consonância com as características do processo de tomada de decisão e as prioridades de cada organização durante a crise. Foram utilizados dados de documentos oficiais e fontes secundárias para descrever os produtos gerados por cada organização no nível político-estratégico, bem como as práticas relacionadas às operações e missões de manutenção da paz no terreno.

**Palavras-chave:** Covid 19; Organizações Internacionais; Operações de Paz; Gerenciamento de Crises.

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