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## **African Security: What is the Issue?**

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**Abstract:** Peace and security are critical conditions for development and prosperity in the African Continent. Most African countries have suffered directly or indirectly from conflicts and crises within their states or from neighboring countries. The Continental body – African Union (AU) has often played an instrumental role with support from the United Nations (UN) in restoring peace and security to the region. Despite these efforts, the trend of insecurity has become persistent, especially in the Sahel region. The concentration of Extremist terrorist groups with strong trans-national criminal networks within ungoverned spaces in the Sahel continues to pose serious security challenges for the continent. The gap between most Sahelian governments and their citizenry is currently exploited by rogue non-state actors to undermine state stability in Africa. This situation has led to unconstitutional changes of governments in Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea and Mali since 2020, compounding the security challenges in the continent. The threat of Extremist terrorism could only be minimized by addressing some fundamental issues that create the conditions for terrorism to thrive. The AU should urge African leaders to address some social, economic and political gaps between their citizens and the state. The current military response cannot address the threat of terrorism in the Sahel.

The wave of Jihadist terrorism in Africa, coupled with election-related violence and recent military coups in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Guinea Bissau and Mali suggest that Africa's peace and security environment remain fragile.<sup>1</sup> Approximately half of the Continent has been afflicted by conflict with ongoing peace processes or post-conflict rebuilding efforts. The United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU) and its Regional Mechanisms are in charge of conflict resolution in Africa. The UN has three out of its four largest peacekeeping missions deployed in Africa.<sup>2</sup> The International Community has shown support for the AU to assume responsibility for resolving conflicts in the continent and has occasionally pledged to help develop self-sufficient African security architecture to undertake Peacekeeping Operations. The AU demonstrated willingness early on to undertake continental peacekeeping in the following countries; Burundi (2004), Central Africa Republic (2014), Comoros (2007), Gambia (2017) Mali (2012), Somalia (2007) and Sudan (2005). However, enhancing AU's technical and institutional capabilities are key challenges that must be addressed if the AU is to be seen as a credible partner in delivering security and stability for Africans.<sup>3</sup>

Multilateral peacekeeping saw a paradigm shift in the Twenty-First Century due to the evolving character of conflicts, as well as the development of the new conflict management tools.<sup>4</sup> Thus, conflict-management in Africa often relied on understanding the root causes and identifying the appropriate response for its resolution. However, evidence suggests that AU is

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<sup>1</sup> Ulf Engel and Porto João Gomes, *Towards an African Peace and Security Regime: Continental Embeddedness, Transnational Linkages, Strategic Relevance* (Abingdon, Oxon ;: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Thierry Tardy and Marco Wyss, "Changing Dimensions of International Peacekeeping in Africa," in *Peacekeeping in Africa: The Evolving Security Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2015), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Hany Besada, *Crafting an African Security Architecture Addressing Regional Peace and Conflict in the 21st Century* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), xxii-xxiii.

<sup>4</sup> See note 1.

incapable of implementing a comprehensive peacekeeping project that addresses the factors responsible for these crises. Timothy Murithi summarized this modern framework thus: “Peacebuilding and development are complementary and mutually inclusive processes that seek to promote social justice, economic equity and political inclusion.”<sup>5</sup> These themes are the fault lines that most often give rise to conflicts in Africa. Thus, military instruments alone cannot deliver security and stability without some comprehensive bottom-up agendas in which; security, governance and socio-economic factors are addressed simultaneously.<sup>6</sup> All AU’s peacekeeping missions have relied heavily on a top-down approach with limited emphasis on co-opting bottom-up strategies. The UN and AU continue to struggle with this same strategy in their efforts to deliver peace and security in Africa. These efforts are met by serious challenges that risk any chance for success. It is important for the AU to re-think its approaches in responding to the African crisis.

### **African Union Normative and Policy Framework**

The Normative and Policy Framework refers to “the values, norms, and principles upon which the institutions and mechanisms of the AU were built, and based on which and to whose realization these institutions and mechanisms operate.”<sup>7</sup> The framework consists of three categories: first, the realization that social justice is an essential element of human development; second, good governance, human rights, rule of law and democracy should prevail; and third, peace and security as a fundamental requirement for achieving development and democracy. The

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy Murithi, *The African Union: Pan-Africanism, Peacebuilding and Development*, (Hampshire: Ashgate : Publishing Limited, 2005), 40.

<sup>6</sup> Tardy and Wyss, *Peacekeeping in Africa*, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Solomon A Dersso, “The Adequacy of the African Peace and Security Architecture to Deal with Serious Democratic Deficit,” *African Security Review* 21, no.3 (2012): 4-23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2012.660491>, 5.

first two categories are embedded in different instruments relating to the establishment of the AU, while the third is framed in the Protocol establishing the Peace and Security Council (PSC). Additionally, there are three legal and policy tools that support the framing of the AU's norms and values. First, is the Common African Defence and Security Policy (CADSP) which establishes the AU's commitment to social justice. It recognizes human security based on issues such as "the right to equal development, as well as, the right to have access to resources and the basic necessities of life."<sup>8</sup> The CADSP further identified poverty, corruption, inequitable distribution of resources as threats to peace, security and stability in Africa. Promoting social justice to ensure balanced economic development is a fundamental principle and value underlying the CADSP.<sup>9</sup> The second instrument is embodied in the AU's Constitutive Act, signed by the African Head of States in Sirte – Libya on 1 July 2000. Article 4 of the Act listed the founding principles, norms and values upon which the AU and its African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) are established. Those which relate to this category include; "human rights, sanctity to human life, democratic principles, good governance, rejection of impunity and unconstitutional change of government and the right of the AU to intervene in a member state in case of grave circumstances."<sup>10</sup> The third is the Protocol establishing the PSC (2004), charged with the responsibility to develop institutions that could prevent, manage and respond to conflicts arising from the first two policy instruments. The protocol also established APSA's constituents' pillar institutions and mechanisms across the continent.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See note above, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Tchioffo Kodjo, "Solemn Declaration on a Common African Defence and Security Policy-African Union - Peace and Security Department," African Union, Peace and Security Department, March 14, 2012, <http://www.peaceau.org/en/article/solemn-declaration-on-a-common-african-defence-and-security-policy>, 85-87.

<sup>10</sup> Makinda and Okumu "The Constitutive Act of the AU, Articles 3(g) and (h)" in *The African Union*, 2008, 126.

<sup>11</sup> Dersso, *African Security Review*, Vol 21, no.3 (2012): 12.

The CADSP considers a violation of AU's norms as a common security threat. This security interdependence is reflected in the AU's objective and goals, as well as, in its principles and values. The AU believes that a threat or aggression (internal or external) against an African nation is deemed to be a threat or aggression to the AU.<sup>12</sup> In essence, any failure of its member states to conform to or violate the commitments relating to the first two categories of norms and their legal and policy instruments is regarded as an attack on the peace and security of the continent. These principles, norms and values as spelled out in several instruments of the AU are the basis upon which the AU could employ its APSA on conflict prevention, management and resolution with or without the consent of member states. However, the inability of member states to safeguard and promote the first two categories of norms and their inherent violations, coupled with the lack of political will on the part of the AU to implement the Article (4h) and (4j) of its Constitutive Act, laid the conditions for conflicts to thrive in Africa. Where deficits exist in the socio-economic order and governance under which people live, it is obvious that political stability, peace and security cannot be guaranteed. The continuing violations of these norms represent the major cause of conflicts in Africa. In effect, resolving Africa's conflicts and providing a peaceful, secure and stable environment demands enforcing these policy instruments on member states by the AU. Thus, the covenant established between the AU and African people is broken by member states of the AU. These norms have turned out to be the root causes of conflict in the continent. The recent coups in Mali (2020), Guinea (2021), Burkina Faso (2022) and Guinea Bissau (2022) are a result of these member states' inability to uphold the norms and values framed by the AU. The issue of youth unemployment, poverty, and lack of public goods

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<sup>12</sup> African Union, "The Solemn Declaration," 2004, 2-3.

within ungoverned spaces and manipulation of the democratic process are norms that have been violated and now triggered a wave of political instability on the continent.<sup>13</sup> Addressing these issues will need some decades of purposeful investments that the African States cannot currently afford. The wave of Extremist Terrorism in the West Africa Sahel is conditioned on these factors that turned out to be the fault lines through which terrorism and insurgency continue to flourish. The current scourge of conflict in Africa could only deepen these fault lines with serious consequences to Africa's stability and development.

### **African Security Architecture**

The establishment of the AU brought about a normative shift, from the principle of non-interference to one of non-indifference. Institutionally, it establishes an extensive PSC (2004) with far-reaching powers to enable it to address the threats to its Normative and Policy Framework and Instruments. Such powers include the right to intervene in a member state either with or without consent.<sup>14</sup> Despite the Assembly of Head of States being the principal organ, the peace and security function of the PSC makes the latter the most important organ in the AU.<sup>15</sup> Article 5 (2) of the PSC Protocol identified four pillars that should support the PSC: Continental Early Warning System (CEWS); Panel of the Wise (POW); African Stand-by Force (ASF); and the Peace Fund. In addition, Articles 8 and 16 further established the Military Staff Committee (MSC) and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs)/Regional Mechanism (RMs) as pillars

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<sup>13</sup> Ulf Engel and João Porto Gomes, *Africa's New Peace and Security Architecture: Promoting Norms and Institutionalising Solutions*. (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate Pub. Co., 2010), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Alhaji Sarjoh Bah et al., "The African Peace and Security Architecture: A Hand Book" (Addis Ababa: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2014), <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/aethiopien/10779.pdf>, 28.

<sup>15</sup> Wolf Kinzel, "The African Standby Force of the African Union. Ambitious Plans, Wide Regional Disparities: An intermediate appraisal," 2008, (Assessed February 02, 2022), [http://www.swp-berlin.org/common/get\\_document.php?asset\\_id=5514](http://www.swp-berlin.org/common/get_document.php?asset_id=5514), 18.



of APSA.<sup>16</sup> The PSC and its pillars are hereafter referred to as the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The continental pillars of the PSC work in tandem with the various Regional Economic Communities (RECs) or RMs peace and security structures established.

The APSA has authorized and deployed PSO missions in Burundi, Comoros Island, Darfur, Somalia, Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR) with diverse mandates since 2003.<sup>17</sup> Though met with strong resistance from African leaders, APSA has also made some attempts on instituting and enforcing AU's Normative and Policy Framework in the continent. For example, the AU's deployment of troops in the Comoros Adjouan Island in 2008 enabled the central government to re-assert legitimate control against belligerent security forces.<sup>18</sup> Also, the AU through APSA responded to the Cote d'Ivoire election crisis, calling on former president Laurent Gbagbo to accept the 2010 election result and relinquish power.

However, recent military coups in Africa indicate that the AU has lost credibility in reversing these coups and restoring constitutional order. The AU has relied more on diplomacy and economic sanctions, with little appetite for military intervention. According to Makinda and Okumu, the ongoing conflicts in Darfur, DRC, Somalia and the deepening crisis in the West African Sahel illustrates the lack of capacity by APSA to implement the framework for which it was created. The AU's inability to fund Africa's defence and security architecture has delivered a major blow to its credibility as a continental organ responsible for peace, security and stability in Africa. Even though the underlying reasons for this incapacity are many, the core reason has been noted to be the concept of self-pacification and lack of political will.<sup>19</sup> The Assembly, being the

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<sup>16</sup> Besada, *Crafting an African Security Architecture*, 2010, 47.

<sup>17</sup> Tardy and Wyss, *Peacekeeping in Africa*, 2014, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Duncan Woodside, State of the Union – The Future of the African Union, HIS Global Limited, 7 July 2011, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Makinda and Okumu, *The African Union*, 2008, 118.

supreme body that authorized APSA's Normative and Policy Framework, continues to be divided over its interpretation and implementation. The principle of consensus that underpinned decision-making within the PSC hinders objective decisions to be taken against some member states who continue to violate APSA's Norms. Also, member states are still facing challenges to fund the operationalisation of APSA and its regional standby forces to address insecurity in their region. Rather, 'Coalition of the willing' member states contribute troops to resolve their insecurity problems that work outside the framework of APSA. The G5 Sahel and the Task Force Brigade in DRC are examples.

### **Conclusion**

The rhetoric of 'African Solution to African Problem' has lost its flavor within the continent. The APSA is hamstrung by its creators- member states of the AU. For Africa to surmount its insecurity challenges, the AU and its member states should have the political will and cohesion to revamp and operationalise APSA as a matter of urgency. Otherwise, the pervasive insecurity in the continent could only create more instability in the region. The most critical line of effort for member states is to uphold and invest in the preservation of all elements of the AU's Normative and Policy Framework. This intervention could take decades to tackle these fault lines. But a journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step.

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