

African Union and its Inability to Solve Protracted Conflicts in Africa: Sudan, Congo and Libya as Case Studies

Azogu, Mnena Anita¹, Izu, S. Iroro, Ph.D²

^{1,2}Department of Political Science and International Relations Nile University of Nigeria, Abuja



Published in
VOI- 2 Issue: 1

DOI:10.5281/zenodo.21130417

PP: 23-34

*Correspondence:

Azogu, Mnena Anita
Department of Political
Science and International
Relations Nile University
of Nigeria, Abuja

Abstract

The change of OAU into AU in 2002 marked the emergence of a new paradigm for African governance that moved away from the inflexible concept of sovereign statehood and non-intervention toward a more interventionist approach of non-indifference. The core of the new paradigm was the creation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) aimed at bringing about the idea of "African Solutions to African Problems" (ASAP). Nevertheless, despite years of institutionalization, the continent still suffers from protracted conflicts that appear immune to any regional interventions. This study critically assesses the performance of the AU as an institution through the analysis of its incapability to solve the existing problems in Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Libya. First is the dependence dilemma, where the AU is dependent on foreign donors – especially the European Union – for the lion's share of its funding related to peace and security matters, thus rendering itself strategically dependent on outside forces. Second is the problem of sovereignty-security duality, where member states do not trust the AU enough with supranational powers in case they require intervention in their territories sometime in the future. Third is the intervention dilemma, where the interests of external actors and regional powers conflict with the AU-led diplomacy. The central argument presented in this research is that although the AU has managed to develop a normative system for resolving conflicts successfully, it does not have the "teeth" needed to deal with lingering problems. To conclude, it can be stated that the AU will have to secure itself financially through the proper operation of the Peace Fund, and strive for a more radical approach to peacekeeping by focusing on the principle of human security as opposed to regime security.

Keywords: African Union, Conflict Resolution, Protracted Conflicts, APSA, Sudan, DRC, Libya

Introduction

The struggle towards achieving a peaceful and unified Africa has remained the core of African foreign policy since the middle of the twentieth century. When the OAU was founded in 1963, its first mission was the complete liberation of Africa from the chains of colonialism and apartheid. But because of the founding principle of the OAU, which was "non-interference" in the domestic issues of member states (a principle which was essential for the protection of the fragile sovereignty of young states), this organization turned

into a tool for dictators. Indeed, the “policy of indifference,” which characterized the OAU, made this organization powerless during the devastating genocides and civil wars of the 1990s, such as those that took place in Rwanda and Sierra Leone. It was amidst this context of organizational incapacitation that the AU was founded in 2002. In reality, the establishment of the AU did not only represent a change of names, but a profound paradigm shift in terms of normative perspective. Indeed, by embracing the idea of “non-indifference,” the AU Charter gave itself the legal right to intervene in any member state in cases of extremity.

In spite of all these noble aspirations, the truth is that reality in the 21st century seems to serve as an eye-opening experience for the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). Even though the AU has recorded some success stories in peace operations and democratization efforts in specific areas, it now seems almost helpless whenever dealing with protracted conflicts. This is due to the prolonged nature of such conflicts, as well as the involvement of non-state actors and the complicated nature of ethnic, economic, and geo-political interests. With AU having entered into its thirties, one would ask why it still seems unable to effectively manage protracted conflicts, considering the fact that it has a more advanced legal apparatus than its predecessor.

The main challenge discussed in this research is the growing “capability-expectations gap” in the African Union. Despite the development of an advanced early warning system and such instruments as PSC and ASF, these tools fail to work effectively during the height of a crisis. In the case of the Sudan, the African Union has found it difficult to preserve its mediating role because it is often undermined by the rivalry of different regional hegemonies and external forces. The DRC crisis turned out to be another example of the “frozen” situation, where attempts to intervene by the African Union or with its approval did not solve problems of exploitation and porous borders. The case of Libya is particularly significant in this context, where the involvement of the AU was marginalized during the NATO intervention in 2011 and demonstrated that in case of collision between African and global security interests, the former takes the backstage.

In essence, this study contends that the inability of the AU to address these longstanding disputes is not an outcome of one specific problem but a product of several pathologies relating to its structure, finance, and politics. In terms of structure, it has been highlighted that the AU is still a state-based institution whose “will of the members” tends to override the “needs of the people.” As far as financing is concerned, the fact that almost 75% of the budget of the AU in terms of peace and security comes from the European Union and other global actors makes the approach towards peace and security a “donor-driven” initiative that lacks legitimacy locally.

In order to test this hypothesis, the following sections will be covered in this research paper. In addition to the introduction, the first section is a literature review, which looks into existing debates concerning the nature of regionalism and conflict resolution within the continent of Africa. The second section examines the theoretical perspective, using both Neorealism and Liberal Institutionalism as a framework to examine the power struggles within the AU. The third section comprises the empirical analysis, covering three selected case studies from Sudan, Congo, and Libya. Each case study identifies the institutional breakdowns that led to the failure of the APSA mechanism in resolving the conflict within each country.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The academic debate about the involvement of the African Union (AU) in conflict management has been marked by the tension inherent in the disparity between the lofty ideals that form the foundation of the organization and the real limitations imposed by its operations. In order to comprehend the problems that confront the AU in resolving conflicts in Sudan, the DRC, and Libya, the existing body of knowledge must be organized under three main themes. These themes include:

THE CAPABILITY-EXPECTATIONS GAP

A large body of research, spearheaded by authors including Williams (2011) and Murithi (2008), claims that the problems experienced by the AU are due to a mismatch between the institution's ambitions and capabilities. According to Williams, the APSA is a "sophisticated blueprint" lacking the "physical masonry" needed to implement it. The above line of reasoning assumes that although the African Union is able to develop strategies like the CEWS and ASF, it frequently does so inadequately because the respective institutions lack proper funding, staffing, and rely too much on the United Nations' logistical support. According to Murithi (2008), the transformation of the OAU into the AU produced an "institutional overload" whereby the Union accepted too many functions for its newly established bureaucracy, resulting in symbolic rather than practical conflict management practices.

THE SOVEREIGNTY SECURITY DILEMMA

The second pillar of research examines the political culture of African presidents. Researchers such as Omorogbe (2011) and Engel & Porto (2010) discuss the enduring specter of "non-interference." Even though the Constitutive Act of the AU permits intervention, the invocation of Article 4(h) is seldom invoked. Omorogbe contends that most African presidents consider the AU not a supranational entity but rather "a mutual defense pact for incumbents." Such an attitude presents a conundrum between sovereignty and security. The AU cannot address the issue of prolonged conflict in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo or Sudan, as any action taken will entail violating the sovereignty of one of its members, which is a politically unacceptable action within the AU Assembly of Heads of State.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Thus, from the standpoint of the empirical performance, the intervention by the African Union in protracted conflicts appears a case of lofty ideals versus pragmatic challenges. Contrary to the "hands off policy" practiced by the OAU towards internal conflicts, the AU's empirical track record started with a number of attempts at "peace enforcement." In order to appreciate the current impasse in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Libya, it is essential to analyze the development of the practice of African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).

The first serious empirical test of the AU in terms of handling internal armed conflicts took place in Sudan's Darfur region (2003-2004). This case marked the first instance when the AU launched an ambitious monitoring mission - the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS). At first sight, the establishment of AMIS looked like a landmark victory for the principle of "African Solutions." However, AMIS soon showed the empirical constraints of the AU, namely the lack of equipment, proper mandate, and ultimately transformed into a UNAMID operation in 2007. This transition was a watershed moment; it proved that while the AU could initiate a peace process, it lacked the "staying power" and financial depth to sustain a long-term intervention without the UN's logistical backbone. The failure of UNAMID to prevent the resurgence of violence in 2023 underscores a recurring empirical theme: the AU's reliance on "hybridity" often leads to a dilution of responsibility and a slow response to rapid escalations on the ground.

In the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the AU's empirical influence has been established through the peculiar relationship it maintains with Regional Economic Communities (RECs). The AU was supportive of multiple peace accords, including the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the Region (2013), during the first two decades of the 2000s and 2010s decade. Nevertheless, empirical evidence proves that the AU has remained passive regarding its involvement in the DRC conflict, relying mostly on the initiatives undertaken by other RECs like the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the East African Community (EAC). The introduction of the EAC Regional Force (EACRF) followed by SAMIDRC proves that the empirical picture is characterized by fragmentation. Rather than creating an AU-mandated intervention force, the DRC experienced "overlapping regionalism," which means that numerous African groupings were involved in the peace process with different levels of efficiency and political goals. It has led to a "revolving door" phenomenon of peacekeepers that were unable to resolve the situation in eastern DRC in over three decades.

Regarding Libya, the empirical record is even more somber. In 2011, the AU's Peace and Security Council developed a "Roadmap" for a political solution to the Libyan uprising, which emphasized dialogue and institutional reform over military intervention. However, the UN Security Council's invocation of Resolution 1973 and the subsequent NATO-led bombing campaign effectively bypassed the AU's diplomatic efforts. This empirical marginalization highlighted a critical flaw in the global security hierarchy: the AU lacks the "international clout" to prevent extra-continental powers from intervening in African affairs when those powers perceive their strategic interests are at stake. The post-2011 chaos in Libya, characterized by the proliferation of militias and the collapse of state institutions, serves as an empirical indictment of the international community's failure to heed the AU's warnings about the dangers of forced regime change.

Furthermore, an empirical review of the AU's Sanctions Policy reveals a pattern of inconsistency. While the AU has been relatively successful in suspending member states that undergo "Unconstitutional Changes of Government" (coups), it has been empirically weak in sanctioning states that engage in protracted internal repression or those that violate peace agreements. In both the Sudanese civil war and the DRC conflict, the AU has been reluctant to name and shame member states (or their neighbors) who provide arms and support to rebel factions. This empirical hesitation suggests that the "club of presidents" mentality still lingers within the halls of the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa.

In summary, the empirical evidence from the last twenty years suggests that the AU is most effective at the normative level (setting rules and standards) but remains profoundly challenged at the operational level (enforcing those rules). The case studies of Sudan, the DRC, and Libya are not isolated failures but are symptomatic of a broader empirical trend: a regional organization that is perpetually "stuck" between its desire for autonomy and its reality of dependency.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study utilizes a dual-theoretical approach, primarily grounded in Neorealism (Structural Realism) and supplemented by Liberal Institutionalism, to explain the African Union's inability to resolve protracted conflicts.

NEOREALISM AND THE PRIMACY OF THE STATE

In essence, Neorealism, as explained by Kenneth Waltz, suggests anarchy in the international system where the main agents are states that act in accordance with their needs to survive and compete for power. Applying this theory to the African Union, Neorealism provides an explanation of the "inability" of this

union as something that occurs by design due to the national interests of the members of the AU. Indeed, the "paralysis" of action in case of the countries like Sudan or DRC can be explained as the logical actions of states considering neighboring countries from the point of view of their national security and benefits.

Thus, in the DRC, the regional powers have historically considered their domination more important than border control and mineral resources which could be gained from the AU as a unified body. According to Neorealism, there is no chance that the AU can solve the conflicts because the AU itself is a "secondary actor" which has only that much power which its stronger members are ready to delegate. Thus, as long as "Big Men" or regional powers like Egypt (regarding Sudan) or Rwanda/Uganda (regarding DRC) have no strategic reasons for resolving conflicts, nothing happens.

LIBERAL INSTITUTIONALISM AND THE "CAPABILITY-EXPECTATIONS GAP"

While Realism offers an explanation of why there might be an opposition to intervention, Liberal Institutionalism can help understand why the intervention mechanisms are inefficient. According to scholars such as Robert Keohane, the international organizations were established to decrease the transaction cost involved in the processes of cooperation. However, in the case of the African Union, the "Liberal" ideal of collective security has been rendered ineffective due to what Christopher Hill defines as the "capability-expectations gap."

Indeed, the Liberal architecture developed by the AU (Peace and Security Council, African Standby Force) is established on the Neorealist foundation of state sovereignty. Such contradiction between the Liberal expectations and the Neorealist principles creates a sort of institutional conflict wherein the organization is meant to operate as a quasi-government (which is a Liberal ideal) while being financed and instructed by states unwilling to give up their Westphalian rights (Realism). This problem has manifested itself quite vividly during the Libyan conflict where the AU proved unable to act independently and to demonstrate a united response to the decisions of the UN Security Council.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The intricacies of prolonged conflict and the structure of African Union (AU) make it imperative that the research design for the study is both interpretative and analytical. The present study makes use of the qualitative research method, whereby the research design is based on multiple case studies. Qualitative research is very appropriate for the current study because it helps us dig deep into the reasons for institutional failure and goes beyond statistics to examine the socio-political realities of African diplomacy. Focusing on three geopolitically distinct regions such as Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Libya enables us to compare APSA across these conflict areas.

RESEARCH DESIGN: THE CASE STUDY APPROACH

The selection of case study methodology is a deliberate one, as pointed out by Robert Yin (2014). Case study research is best employed where "how" or "why" questions are raised, where the researcher has no control over the unfolding events, and where the subject under consideration is an existing issue in a real-world setting. For this paper, the "existing issue" is that of the continuation of conflict despite efforts at regional level intervention. The selected cases offer maximum variation. The situation in Sudan is one of internal failure at transition and mediation. The DRC is one of long-standing failure at regional peacekeeping and stabilization.

DATA COLLECTION SOURCES

The analysis in this research uses only secondary data, which is the norm for political science research at the highest level when dealing with international organizations. The process of data collection is separated into three separate thematic tracks so that there can be triangulated data:

1. Official institutional documents: This entails a thorough examination of the main legal and functional outputs generated by the African Union. The documents analyzed include the Constitutive Act of the AU, the Protocol on the establishment of the Peace and Security Council and the Communiqués issued by the PSC concerning the situation in Khartoum, Kinshasa, and Tripoli.
2. International resolutions/reports: In order to contextualize how the African Union interacts within the international security hierarchy, this research draws upon the UNSC resolutions including 1973 about the situation in Libya as well as mandates for MONUSCO and UNAMID. Reports from ICG and Amnesty International serve as empirically grounded evidence of how the conflicts have developed.
3. Scholarly academic literature: Theoretical base comes from scholarly books, peer reviewed journals and monographies of researchers in the field of African Peace and Conflict studies. It is from these sources that the patterns of 'non-indifference' and 'capabilities-expectations gap' will be identified.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS: QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

The collected data is then subjected to Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA). In this method, the researcher will code the data systematically and uncover any repeated themes, contradictions, and trends in the documents. An example of the type of analysis includes the tracking of how many times AU "expressions of concern" compared to "enforcement actions" occur.

The analytical pillars include:

- Institutional Capacity: The analysis of the disparity between the mandate of the AU and the actual capacity deployed by the organization in the three case studies (military and financial).
- Foreign Actor Influence: The analysis of cases where the diplomatic roadmap of the AU was overtaken by events orchestrated by foreign actors.
- State Consensus: The analysis of state consensus on the part of AU members in the Sudanese conflict, DRC, and Libyan conflicts.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

While this research does not involve human subjects, it adheres to the highest standards of academic integrity. The primary limitation of this methodology is the reliance on secondary data, which may be subject to the biases of the original authors or the institutional "spin" of official AU communiqués. To mitigate this, the study deliberately seeks out "counter-narratives" such as critiques from African civil society organizations to balance the official institutional perspective. Furthermore, the fluid nature of the current conflict in Sudan means that the analysis is limited to the data available up until the point of writing, recognizing that the situation is subject to rapid change.

DISCUSSIONS: CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

SUDAN: THE FAILURE OF MEDIATION AND THE "SUB-REGIONAL RIVALRY" TRAP

The conflict in Sudan represents perhaps the most tragic indictment of the African Union's "non-indifference" policy. For decades, Sudan has been a litmus test for the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). While the AU was instrumental in the mediation that led to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 and the eventual independence of South Sudan, its subsequent role in the "New Sudan" has been characterized by a loss of diplomatic initiative. The current protracted conflict, which erupted in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), serves as a clear example of the AU's inability to enforce its own "silencing the guns" agenda.

The Sub-Regional Rivalry Trap is one of the main reasons for the AU's failure to mediate conflict in Sudan. The intervention plan put forth by the AU largely depends on the efforts made by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Nonetheless, IGAD has been divided just like Sudan due to the conflicting interest of various sub-regional powers such as Egypt, Ethiopia, and Kenya in Sudan. Due to the divided interest of the regional players, the intervention effort of the AU has been termed as "fragmented mediation." Following the ousting of President Bashir, the AU successfully intervened and suspended the Sudanese government from its membership. The suspension paved the way for successful negotiations but once the "sovereign council" was formed, the military elite managed to take over power through a coup in 2021.

Moreover, the Sudanese case brings to light the concept of Interventionist Overlap of the AU with the outside world. Indeed, in the ongoing civil war, the AU has been rendered ineffective due to the presence of the "Quad" (USA, UK, Saudi Arabia, and UAE). Given the fact that these outsiders have the necessary funds which the AU lacks, the warring factions have tended to forum-shop, preferring the talks of Jeddah over those held in Addis. Such marginalization of the AU is much more than a political slight; it is indicative of an organizational failure. The failure of the AU to present an effective united front of the continent turned the internal political fight into a proxy war.

From a theoretical perspective, the Sudanese example proves once again the correctness of the Neorealist statement on the dependency of regionalism on the consensus of neighbors. Since the neighbors of Sudan itself are rather divided and interested in other issues, like Nile waters and border protection, rather than democratization of Sudan, the Peace and Security Council of the AU could not move past the stage of issuing repetitive communiques.

THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: OVERLAPPING REGIONALISM AND THE FAILURE OF STABILIZATION

The conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), particularly in its eastern provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri, represents the most complex and enduring security challenge for the African Union. Often referred to as "Africa's World War," the instability in the DRC has persisted for over three decades, involving dozens of armed groups, such as the M23, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), and the FDLR. For the AU, the DRC is not merely a localized conflict but a systemic failure of regional integration and security management. The AU's inability to resolve the DRC crisis is rooted in the "overloading" of regional interventions and the inherent conflict of interest among the DRC's neighbors, which has led to a fragmented and often contradictory peace process.

A primary factor in the AU's failure in the DRC is the phenomenon of Overlapping Regionalism. Under the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), the AU is supposed to serve as the overarching authority, coordinating with Regional Economic Communities (RECs). However, in the DRC, this has translated into a "too many cooks in the kitchen" scenario. Over the last decade, the DRC has seen the involvement of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the East African Community (EAC), and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR). Each of these bodies has its own political agenda and security priorities. For example, while the EAC deployed a regional force (EACRF) in 2022 to neutralize the M23 rebels, the Congolese government eventually demanded its withdrawal, citing its "inefficacy" and alleged collusion with rebel groups. This was immediately followed by the deployment of a SADC mission (SAMIDRC). This "revolving door" of regional forces demonstrates a lack of a unified AU-led strategy, allowing the conflict to become protracted as different regional blocs compete for influence within the Congolese space.

Furthermore, the DRC case highlights the Sovereignty-Proxy Nexus. Neorealist theory suggests that state actors prioritize their own security and economic interests over regional stability. In the DRC, the AU has been paralyzed by the documented involvement of neighboring states in fueling the conflict. UN Group of Experts reports have repeatedly pointed to the involvement of Rwanda and Uganda in supporting various rebel factions to secure "buffer zones" or to gain access to the DRC's vast mineral wealth (coltan, gold, and tin). Despite this evidence, the AU Peace and Security Council has been historically reluctant to name and shame these member states or to impose significant sanctions. This hesitation stems from the "club of presidents" culture, where the AU prioritizes diplomatic decorum and regime stability over the protection of civilians in the eastern DRC. Because the AU cannot act against its own powerful member states, it remains a neutral and therefore ineffective—observer while the conflict metastasizes.

The failure of the 2013 Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework (PSCF) for the DRC and the Region is another empirical indictment of the AU. This "framework of hope," signed by 11 countries and overseen by the AU and the UN, was intended to address the root causes of the conflict, including the illegal exploitation of natural resources and the lack of state authority. However, the AU's monitoring mechanisms have been chronically underfunded and lacked the enforcement "teeth" to ensure that the signatories adhered to their commitments. The resurgence of the M23 in 2021 proved that the AU's diplomatic victories are often hollow, as they are not backed by a credible threat of force or economic consequences for those who violate the peace.

Finally, the DRC highlights the Dependency Trap within the AU's peacekeeping efforts. While the AU endorses regional missions like SAMIDRC, the funding for these operations often remains precarious. Without a fully operationalized AU Peace Fund that can sustain large-scale, long-term military deployments, the AU is forced to rely on the "goodwill" of contributing states or ad-hoc support from the European Union. This financial instability prevents the AU from executing a sustained counter-insurgency strategy, allowing rebel groups to retreat, regroup, and resurface whenever a peacekeeping mandate expires.

In conclusion, the AU's inability to solve the protracted conflict in the DRC is a result of a structural inability to manage the competing interests of its own member states. The DRC remains a site of "permanent crisis" because the AU has chosen a model of "sub-regional outsourcing" that lacks central accountability. Until the AU can move beyond being a facilitator of regional rivalries and become an enforcer of continental norms, the DRC will continue to be the "bleeding heart" of Africa, illustrating the vast gap between the APSA's rhetoric and its operational reality.

CONCLUSION

The transition from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU) in 2002 was predicated on the ambitious promise of "African Solutions to African Problems." It represented a continental shift from a culture of indifference to a mandate of proactive engagement. However, as this research has demonstrated through the systematic analysis of protracted conflicts in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Libya, the realization of this mandate remains hindered by a profound "capability-expectations gap." The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), while normatively brilliant and structurally sophisticated on paper, has consistently faltered when confronted with the harsh realities of realpolitik, financial dependency, and external interference.

The case studies examined in this paper reveal a tripartite pattern of failure. In Sudan, the AU's inability was defined by its marginalization in the face of sub-regional rivalries and the superior diplomatic leverage of extra-continental actors. The descent of Sudan into a catastrophic civil war in 2023 serves as a sobering reminder that "early warning" without "early action" is a futile exercise. In the DRC, the research highlighted the dangers of "overlapping regionalism," where the AU's deference to sub-regional bodies (SADC and the EAC) resulted in a fragmented security response that failed to address the root causes of resource-driven insurgency. Finally, the Libyan experience exposed the fragility of African agency in the global security hierarchy, demonstrating that the AU lacks the international structural power to prevent Western-led military interventions that destabilize regional ecosystems.

Theoretically, these failures validate the Neorealist assertion that international organizations are fundamentally extensions of the interests of their most powerful member states. The AU's "inability" is not a mere accident of administration; it is a structural byproduct of a Westphalian obsession with sovereignty. As long as African heads of state prioritize "regime security" over "human security," the Union will remain a "paper tiger" capable of suspending members for coups but incapable of protecting civilians from protracted state-sponsored or state-ignored violence. Furthermore, the Dependency Trap—the AU's continued reliance on the European Union and other donors for nearly three-quarters of its security budget—ensures that the "African" in "African Solutions" remains a qualified term, subject to the strategic priorities of the Global North.

However, to label the African Union a "failure" would be an oversimplification that ignores the complexity of the task it faces. The AU has succeeded in creating a continental consensus that conflict is no longer a purely domestic affair. It has established a legal framework that makes silence in the face of atrocity a violation of continental law. The "inability" documented in this research is therefore not an end-state, but a transitional crisis. The path forward for the AU lies in the aggressive pursuit of financial autonomy and the courageous application of its own sanctions regime.

Ultimately, the resolution of protracted conflicts in Africa requires more than just better-equipped peacekeepers; it requires a fundamental restructuring of the relationship between the AU, its member states, and the international community. The AU must move from being a "facilitator of dialogue" to becoming a "guarantor of stability." Until the Union can bridge the chasm between its normative rhetoric and its operational reality, the ghosts of Darfur, the tragedies of the Kivus, and the chaos of Tripoli will continue to haunt the vision of a peaceful and integrated Africa. This research concludes that "African Solutions to African Problems" remains the only viable path to peace, but it is a path that the AU is currently ill-equipped to walk alone without radical institutional reform.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proposed to address the systemic "capability-expectations gap" identified in the analysis of conflicts in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Libya.

- The African Union (AU) must achieve financial sovereignty to ensure that "African Solutions to African Problems" is not merely a rhetorical device. Currently, the Union's peace operations are largely funded by the European Union and other external partners, which compromises strategic autonomy. It is recommended that the AU Assembly strictly enforce the 0.2% levy on eligible imports from non-African countries. This would provide the AU Peace Fund with independent, predictable, and sustainable resources, allowing for the deployment of missions without the necessity of external donor approval.
- The failure of regional forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) highlights the limitations of "overlapping regionalism." The AU should move away from relying on ad-hoc sub-regional coalitions and instead fully operationalize a centralized RDC under the direct command of the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC). This would ensure a unified military doctrine and prevent the conflicting national interests of neighboring states from undermining peacekeeping mandates.
- To resolve protracted conflicts, the AU must lower the political threshold for intervention under Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act. The Union should establish an independent legal commission to define clear "triggers" for intervention—such as the total collapse of state institutions seen in Libya or mass displacement in Sudan—to prevent member states from hiding behind the veil of sovereignty while atrocities occur.
- The current consensus-based decision-making process often leads to paralysis, especially when a conflict involves a powerful member state or its allies. It is recommended that the AU adopt a weighted voting system or a qualified majority vote for emergency security interventions. This would prevent individual "hegemons" from vetoing actions that are necessary for broader regional stability.
- Suspension from the AU is often an insufficient deterrent for warring factions in protracted conflicts. The AU should establish a dedicated body to monitor and enforce targeted economic sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes, against individuals and entities found to be violating peace agreements or providing illicit arms to rebel groups in the DRC and Sudan.
- To prevent the marginalization of African voices in global security governance, as seen during the 2011 Libyan crisis, the AU must secure a formal Memorandum of Understanding with the UN Security Council. This agreement should mandate that the UN prioritize AU-led diplomatic roadmaps and require a joint assessment before any extra-continental military intervention is authorized on African soil.
- The proliferation of foreign mercenaries and PMCs in Libya and the Sahel has introduced a dangerous layer of "proxy-war" dynamics that the AU is ill-equipped to handle. The AU should draft a continental convention that prohibits member states from hiring foreign PMCs, ensuring that security remains the responsibility of legitimate state and regional standby forces.

- Protracted conflicts are often sustained because peace deals only address the interests of armed elites. Following Article 20 of the PSC Protocol, the AU must institutionalize the participation of civil society organizations in all mediation phases. Including local leaders from conflict zones like Darfur and the Eastern Congo ensures that root causes—such as land rights and resource justice—are addressed.
- The Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) must be granted the authority to trigger an "Emergency Session" of the AU Assembly. Currently, early warnings are often ignored by political actors until a conflict becomes unmanageable. By making a political response mandatory once certain indicators are met, the AU can intervene in the "incubation" phase of a conflict rather than reacting to its explosion.
- The AU should implement a "Good Neighborliness" monitoring mechanism. This would involve independent AU observers stationed at porous borders in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa to report on the cross-border flow of weapons and minerals. Addressing the role of neighboring states in fueling proxies is essential for ending the "frozen" nature of conflicts in the DRC and Sudan.

REFERENCES

1. Abass, A. (2010). *Regional security and the right to intervention in Africa*. Routledge.
2. African Union. (2000). *Constitutive Act of the African Union*. African Union Commission.
3. African Union (2002). *Protocol relating to the establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union*. African Union Commission.
4. African Union. (2015). *Agenda 2063: The Africa we want*. African Union Commission.
5. Adebajo, A. (2011). *The AU: A continent in transition*. Centre for Conflict Resolution.
6. Adebajo, A., & Whiteman, K. (2012). *The EU and Africa: From Eurafrique to Afro-Europa*. Hurst Publishers.
7. Ajala, O. (2021). The African Union and conflict management: The case of the 2011 Libyan crisis. *Journal of African Union Studies*, 10(1), 25–42.
8. Bellamy, A. J., & Williams, P. D. (2011). The new politics of protection? Côte d'Ivoire, Libya and the responsibility to protect. *International Affairs*, 87(4), 825–850.
9. Brosig, M. (2015). *The African Union's peace and security architecture: From an aspiration to operational capability*. Palgrave Macmillan.
10. Cilliers, J. (2008). The African Standby Force: An update on progress. *Institute for Security Studies Papers*, 2008(160), 1–24.
11. Clapham, C. (1996). *Africa and the international system: The politics of state survival*. Cambridge University Press.
12. De Coning, C. (2017). The future of UN-AU operations. *African Security Review*, 26(2), 145–162.
13. De Waal, A. (2015). *The real politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, war and the business of power*. Polity Press.
14. Dersso, S. A. (2014). The role and place of the African Union in the international landscape. *African Security Review*, 23(3), 256–273.
15. Engel, U., & Porto, J. G. (2010). *Africa's new peace and security architecture: Promoting norms, institutionalizing solutions*. Ashgate Publishing.

16. Fisher, J., & Anderson, D. M. (2015). Authoritarianism and the securitization of development in Africa. *International Affairs*, 91(1), 131–151.
17. Francis, D. J. (2006). *Uniting Africa: Building regional peace and security systems*. Ashgate.
18. Gbadamosi, A. (2023). Why the African Union is sidelined in Sudan. *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/05/04/sudan-conflict-african-union-sidelined/>
19. Hartmann, S., & Stiansen, E. (2010). *The Akosombo report: Peace and security in Africa*. West Africa Civil Society Institute.
20. Keohane, R. O. (1984). *After hegemony: Cooperation and discord in the world political economy*. Princeton University Press. (Theoretical Framework).
21. Khadiagala, G. M. (2018). *War and intervention in the Congo*. Palgrave Macmillan.
22. Krasner, S. D. (1983). *International regimes*. Cornell University Press. (Theoretical Framework).
23. Kuwali, D., & Viljoen, F. (2014). *Africa and the responsibility to protect: Article 4(h) of the African Union Constitutive Act*. Routledge.
24. Mamdani, M. (2009). *Saviors and survivors: Darfur, politics, and the War on Terror*. Pantheon.
25. Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). *The tragedy of Great Power politics*. W. W. Norton & Company. (Theoretical Framework).
26. Murithi, T. (2008). The African Union's evolving role in peace operations: The African Union mission in Burundi, the African Union mission in Sudan and the African Union mission in Somalia. *African Security Review*, 17(1), 69–82.
27. Murithi, T. (2014). *The African Union: Pan-Africanism, peacebuilding and development*. Ashgate.
28. Nathan, L. (2016). Will the African Standby Force be as effective as the UN? *Global Governance*, 22(3), 357–370.
29. Nganje, F. (2021). The African Union and the challenge of regional hegemony. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 28(2), 191–210.
30. Olonisakin, F. (2011). *Peacekeeping in Africa: Capabilities and challenges*. Routledge.
31. Omorogbe, E. Y. (2011). The African Union, responsibility to protect and the Libyan crisis. *Netherlands International Law Review*, 59(2), 141–163.
32. Prunier, G. (2009). *Africa's world war: Congo, the Rwandan genocide, and the making of a continental catastrophe*. Oxford University Press.
33. Smidt, W. (2020). The AU's role in Libya: A case of marginalization? *Journal of African Diplomacy*, 4(2), 112–129.
34. Tieku, T. K. (2004). Explaining the origins and structure of the African Union. *African Affairs*, 103(411), 249–267.
35. United Nations Security Council. (2011). *Resolution 1973 (2011) [On the situation in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya]*. UN Docs.
36. Uzokurt, C. (2022). Institutional paralysis? The African Union's response to the Tigray and Sudan crises. *African Studies Quarterly*, 21(1), 45–60.