

## ARTICLE

# Conflict Management in Africa: The African Union's Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)

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### Abstract

The African continent, with its history of regional cooperation rooted in Pan-Africanism, has faced numerous challenges since independence, including internal disputes, neocolonialism, and underdevelopment. The Organization of African Unity (OAU), established in 1963, operated modestly in addressing security issues, especially amidst the violent civil wars of the post-Cold War era. As international responses, notably from the United Nations and OAU, fell short, the African Union (AU) emerged in 2002 with a renewed agenda focused on integration and proactive engagement with the continent's security challenges. In this context, this study explores the reasons for establishing a collective security framework in Africa, considering three main factors: i) the prevalence of conflicts in the 1990s, ii) the ineffective international responses, and iii) the historical integration process with the OAU tied to Pan-African ideology. Through a qualitative analysis spanning national, continental, and global levels, this work examines the causes and characteristics of African wars post-Cold War, the UN's role, and the creation and operational aspects of the AU's Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). Therefore, the role of the African Union as a qualified space for conflict management on the continent is perceived. As the AU navigates this role, the imperative for African-led solutions to African problems becomes evident. But despite progress, African conflicts remain complex, rooted in multifaceted political, economic, social, and historical factors. In this sense, the AU's future effectiveness hinges on strengthening political will, enhancing institutional capabilities, and defining its autonomy within international partnerships.

**Keywords:** African Union; Security; African conflicts; Peacekeeping; Peace Operations; Peace and Security Architecture

## 1. Introduction

The African continent was one of the first regions to develop regional cooperation structures and a mindset aligned with the ideal of cooperation among African peoples: Pan-Africanism<sup>1</sup>. Even in a diverse continent like Africa, colonial history brought these states together in different levels, especially concerning overcoming common post-independence problems: internal political disputes, neocolonial presence, and socioeconomic underdevelopment.

Amidst the processes of independence, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was established in 1963. However, over the decades, the OAU operated modestly in relation to its purposes, especially regarding security issues. The outbreak of various violent civil wars on the continent at the end of the Cold War highlighted the organization's challenges. Similarly, other international organizations, such as the United Nations, proved ineffective in dealing with the continent's conflicts, accumulating failures in the 1990s.

In this context, the creation of the African Union (AU) in 2002 sought to overcome the problems of the old organization, creating a new African agenda with the aim of accelerating the integration process in Africa and acting more assertively on the economic, social, political, and security issues faced by countries on the continent. The Peace and Security Architecture of the African Union (APSA), the security axis of the AU, stands as a regional alternative in promoting and maintaining peace on the continent. Thus, the African Union has been assuming an important role in conflict management on the continent, even conducting its own peacekeeping missions.

Therefore, this article aims to evaluate the reasons for creating a collective security framework on the African continent, as well as its institutional and operational characteristics. The hypothesis revolves around three factors: i) the presence of a considerable number of conflicts, especially in the 1990s, and conflicts with distinct characteristics; ii) international responses, primarily focused on the United Nations, were largely unsuccessful; and iii) there was an integration and cooperation process in this sector since the independence processes with the OAU, linked to the Pan-African ideology. Thus, the objectives and sections of the article will follow these three factors, first analyzing the causes and characteristics of war in Africa at the end of the Cold War and the role of the United Nations in them, and then examining the creation of the AU and its APSA, highlighting the fundamental role of Pan-Africanism.

Therefore, this work uses a theoretical-methodological analysis at three levels - national/domestic; continental/regional; and global/systemic - which overlap in a kind of concentric circles of mutual dependence. As a qualitative research, the focus is on examining interests, motivations, and policies in detail through historical narratives to explain the complex and interdependent processes at the three levels. Through a historical and analytical approach to each of these levels, we can identify the roles of the actors involved, their agendas, and their relationships, without seeking theoretical generalization about the phenomenon.

## 2. War in Africa: Causes and Characteristics

The African continent's recent history is often linked to stereotypes, simplifications, and distortions, invoking images of perpetual and "senseless"<sup>2</sup> civil wars. However, a deeper analysis quickly surpasses

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1. Esebebe (1980) summarizes Pan-Africanism as a political and cultural movement that regards Africa, Africans, and descendants of Africans beyond borders as a unified entity. Its goal is to regenerate and unify Africa while fostering a sense of solidarity among African populations worldwide (Esebebe 1980, 5). Pan-Africanism evolved through various phases and branches, rooted in the struggle for liberation of African peoples both in Africa and the diaspora.

2. It is essential to highlight that the presence of wars, whether internal or external, in the formation of states is not a unique characteristic of Africa. Violence and war are structural aspects of human history. Since the establishment of the first settled communities, war has become a universal phenomenon, with civilizations emerging from warfare (Fossaert 1996; Keegan 2006). However, the wars in independent Africa often become topics of discussion in academic circles and, particularly, in the media, depicting the continent's history and linking their presence to concepts of "barbarism," "backwardness," and even a form of "civilizational inferiority" among these peoples. These ideas have roots in Eurocentric and racist ideologies that influenced the capitalist expansion to the periphery in the 19th century through colonialism (Balibar and Wallerstein 2021).

such explanations, revealing distinct types of conflicts and politically rational foundations (Visentini 2016). Different forms of violent conflicts have occurred from decolonization to the present day under different systemic, regional, and national contradictions. In this context, it is understood that internal power struggles within each country, rooted in unequal power relations that preceded and survived colonialism and were exacerbated by the post-Cold War context, were also conditioned by World System dynamics, whether during World War II, the Cold War, its aftermath, or in the framework of the more recent "War on Terror." However, regional dynamics such as Pan-Africanism and regional integration processes were also important factors that shaped the characteristics of these conflicts during these periods (Kalyvas 2008).

Between 1945 and 1975, many conflicts on the continent were linked to struggles for independence between emerging African national liberation movements and weakened European metropolises after World War II. Besides European weakening, anti-imperialist ideology (motivated by the rise of the two superpowers – the USA and the USSR) and the military engagement of colonies in the war accelerated the crisis of colonialism and national liberation struggles. The peak of these movements was in the 1950s, with the Algerian War of Independence, but they would resurface violently in the 1970s with the late liberation of Portuguese Africa (Visentini, Ribeiro, and Pereira 2017; Wallerstein 2005). Even between colonies and metropolises, these liberation movements emerge as insurgent groups against the metropolis's central power in their territory, using guerrilla tactics in an irregular war<sup>3</sup>, thus taking the form of a civil war (Reno 2011).

The rivalry between Cold War superpowers became a dominant factor in African wars from the 1970s. The continent witnessed high-intensity conflicts for influence spaces between the two superpowers, supporting internal groups in power struggles (Shubin 2008). The so-called proxy war is defined as an armed conflict in which there is support from a main actor – seeking to avoid direct involvement and responsibility for the war – to another proxy. In this sense, a proxy war is an armed conflict fought by proxy, meaning the disputing countries use third parties to avoid direct confrontation (Cardoso 2020). These supports for African disputes even involved large-scale presence of Soviet, Cuban<sup>4</sup>, and American military and weapons (Schmidt 2013).

Consequently, African regional powers also began using proxy conflict against their neighbors from the 1980s, also a consequence of the regionalization of disputes on the continent. Due to porous borders and lack of control over the entire territory, especially amid civil wars, insurgent groups seek support for their cause from neighboring countries. Often these populations have common histories predating the arrival of Europeans, sparking leaders' interest in garnering more support for their cause (Chazan et al. 1999; Williams 2016). This regional expansion of conflict, combined with proxy support from neighbors, can also lead to secessionist disputes. Added to all these issues is the massive displacement of populations fleeing the terror of war, leading to the creation of the world's largest refugee camps in Africa, such as the Dadaab Complex in Kenya, which currently hosts almost 300,000 people, half of whom come from the war in neighboring country, Somalia. Therefore, although conflicts in Africa have local roots, external political and military interventions (by regional powers, extraregional powers, or international organizations<sup>5</sup>) have altered their dynamics and made

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3. Irregular warfare refers to the characteristic use of force by the warring parties. Also known as guerrilla warfare, both strategy and tactics need to be adjusted compared to conventional and regular wars because there is a numerical and force disadvantage between opponents. Asymmetry is predominantly manifested in irregular warfare, although the concept of asymmetric warfare is not synonymous with that of irregular conflict. Asymmetric warfare refers to the correlation of forces in combat. These concepts are interconnected because the strategy of weaker forces in asymmetric warfare often involves irregular, non-conventional tactics (Kalyvas 2008).

4. Cuba's role in the African continent during the Cold War is cited due to its exceptional nature. Cuba's African policy was comparable to that of major powers, despite being an economically underdeveloped state. In alliance with the USSR but often acting independently, the Caribbean nation was present in several African countries in support of nationalist and socialist movements (Pereira 2016a).

5. Humanitarian intervention is also characterized as external intervention, even if conducted by regional organizations such as the AU, ECOWAS, and SADC. Their role in conflicts will be further explored in a specific section of this article

them more lethal (Schmidt 2018).

The prevalence of internal conflicts, the so-called "civil wars," despite all their discussed internationalization, marked the African continent and influenced (and continues to influence) the construction of its states, as well as regional cooperation attempts, such as the OAU and the AU (Collier and Sambanis 2005; Reno 2011; Williams 2016).

The main military objectives of conflicts within African nation-states were of two types: taking over the government, which is the civil war itself, or secession. It is worth noting that these internal wars did not produce major geographical changes in the continent's borders<sup>6</sup>. On the contrary, these insurgent groups mostly challenged the state's ruling classes for control of central power, staying within the national borders inherited from colonization (Reno 2011; Wallerstein 2005). One possible explanation for this context is related to Pan-Africanism and its institutionalization with the OAU. The self-confidence of Pan-Africanism was the basis for inter-African cooperation since independence and played an important role in defending political sovereignty and the colonial-era borders, resulting in few territorial and border disputes (Wallerstein 2005; Karbo and Murithi 2018).

Furthermore, as shown, insurgencies have been present in Africa since the liberation movements, followed immediately by dissatisfaction with non-representative or autocratic regimes in states marked by neocolonialism, and also as a consequence of economic marginalization of the population in times of crisis (Chazan et al. 1999; Arrighi 2006). With the end of the Cold War, the defense of socialism or national developmentalism within internal African disputes lost ground, opening the door for other justifications for conflict, such as ethnic, clan-based, or religious rivalries (Visentini 2016; Reno 2011; Williams 2016).

The political elites leading these organizations use ethnicity and religious identity to promote their agendas, forming a powerful basis for mobilization and cohesion, becoming an important ingredient for endorsing violence scenarios on the continent (Chazan et al. 1999; Schmidt 2013; Williams 2016). Therefore, ethnicity or religion serves as a backdrop or underlying component for the outbreak of armed conflicts. Moreover, ethnicity and religion are not static characteristics; on the contrary, their political content and importance can be constructed or distributed by actors to shape scenarios (Chazan et al. 1999; Cohen 1969; González 2018).

Another complicating factor of African conflicts is the continent's significant presence of natural resources. From colonialism, through coal, gold, and diamonds, to current disputes over oil, uranium, or coltan, Africa is at the center of numerous international disputes over raw materials essential for capitalism (Visentini 2016). Many post-Cold War armed conflicts on the continent are referred to as "resource wars." Understanding these resources as "means," their importance for war becomes clear, not as a cause but as a complicating factor. For internal actors in the dispute, financing capabilities for victory or prolongation of the conflict are important. In addition to conflict financing and sustainability, profits from exploiting these resources in war encouraged their prolongation, hampering peace attempts. The chaos of war, or the "war economy," benefits these groups' activities in international trade; thus, a peace agreement is not in their interest (Álvarez Acosta 2011; Mateos 2010). The actors extracting and selling these resources amid armed conflict should also be analyzed. The role of the ruling classes here appears central because the social construction of resources is directly related to the development of the global economy, making these conflicts more transnational, regional, and global (Williams 2016).

Thinking about the causes of conflicts in Africa involves considering their material nature, hence the organization of global capitalism itself. The continent's underdevelopment is a central factor for the emergence of internal contestatory groups. Insurgent groups stem from economic marginalization and lack of access to social resources, viewing armed struggle as a means to seize

following this.

6. In the post-Cold War era, it is essential to highlight the dispute in Sudan, which resulted in the independence of South Sudan in 2011. Apart from this, historically, there is the example of Eritrea, but the colonial borders have remained and are defended by African countries.

these resources and powers (Schmidt 2013; Samoff 1982). According to Badmus (2017), the level of economic development influences the presence or absence of conflicts in a country. In other words, "the more economically developed a state is, the less prone it is to conflicts" (Badmus 2017, 13). Conversely, dialectically, Álvarez Acosta (2011) understands conflict as an influencer of society's development, in this case, socioeconomic development, or the advancement of development projects, is only possible with stability. Thus, one is always connected to the other.

Therefore, it is understood that post-Cold War conflicts on the African continent have gone through these same characteristics reported since colonial liberation wars because they are linked to Africa's position in the international structure and the persistence of neocolonialism. The colonial/neocolonial legacy and external economic dependency were deepened with the impact of economic adjustments in the 1980s, producing the so-called African "lost decades" in the 1980s and 1990s (Arrighi 2006). The re-emergence of conflicts in an accentuated manner with the end of the Cold War needs to be analyzed from this conjuncture. The loss of the continent's strategic role, combined with the economic and social crises stemming from Africa's economic marginalization in the 1980s and 1990s, led to the emergence of armed conflicts. The end of the bipolar dispute began to affect the African continent in the early 1980s, with reduced external support from powers to Third World allies, leading several African dictatorial regimes to collapse. Furthermore, thousands of weapons supplied for the conflicts spread across the continent are now in private hands forming militias dedicated to crime (Schmidt 2013; Visentini 2016).

In response to the international crisis of the 1970s, the expansion of neoliberalism began. The imposition of neoliberal globalization and "adjustment democracy" by Western-dominated international financial institutions ignored the reality and needs of African societies, imposing extensive privatization of public services, further reducing these states' capacities (Chazan *et al.* 1999; Clapham 1996). With the reduction of the state apparatus and the loss of power by ruling classes, other forces emerge to fill this space, increasing internal instability on the continent (Schmidt 2013).

The social chaos that followed in the 1990s produced a new wave of external interventions in Africa, led by the UN, as we will see below. At the turn of the century, foreign military presence on the continent took on another level, now under the umbrella of the so-called War on Terror<sup>7</sup>. However, it must be reiterated that the use of terrorism as a strategy in asymmetric conflicts did not emerge at this moment in the African continent. It had already been widely employed by insurgent groups since colonial struggles due to the psychological effect it propagates (Halliday 1994). New forms of intervention would be used in Africa, with the USA as the leader, under the justification that these states' internal instability was a threat to international peace and security (Keenan 2013). Similarly, France has been trying to maintain its area of influence through military interventions (Schmidt 2018). Moreover, these groups, now renamed terrorists, are consequences of the same issues that triggered the emergence of groups in the 1990s: structural and conjunctural conditions in the world system, coupled with central governments' inability to provide social goods to all regions of the country and ensure private property, marginalizing part of the population, which now sees these groups as a way to overcome their socioeconomic conditions (González 2018; 2023).

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7. As the focus of this article is the creation of the African Union, we do not delve into the dynamics of conflicts from the 2000s onwards. However, the role of Africa in the War on Terror will be central. Along with international surveillance stemming from the transnational activities of terrorist groups, terrorism infiltrated within the borders of so-called failed or fragile states. In other words, these ungoverned states or areas could either provide support for terrorist actions or be unable to counter them (Ferreira 2014; Nasser 2009; Tokatlian 2009). By associating terrorism with the Muslim religion in a continent with approximately 40% of the population being Muslim, the belief that it was, in fact, a war against Islam was reinforced. This increased hostilities among African populations towards Americans (Schmidt 2018).

### 3. The United Nations and Peacekeeping in Africa

Africa has been a priority for United Nations security efforts since its inception<sup>8</sup>, especially since the end of the Cold War. Its crises and changes were both caused by and a consequence of the evolution of African conflicts. In the same vein, the United Nations' actions in Africa have influenced conflict dynamics and the responses of regional organizations. In this sense, in agreement with Adebajo (2011), it is understood that Africa has historically served as a laboratory for UN peacekeeping.

After the failures of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which exacerbated the 1980s crisis, the 1990s were marked by the outbreak of various conflicts on the continent (Chazan et al. 1999; Clapham 1996; Visentini, Ribeiro and Pereira 2017). The international attempt at a security solution for these conflicts came with the strengthening of the UN. With the end of the Cold War, the Security Council gained strength as the main body responsible for global peacekeeping, due to increased cooperation among the powers with permanent seats (Bellamy and Williams 2021).

The Second Generation of Peacekeeping Operations<sup>9</sup> saw a significant increase in UN involvement: from 1948 to 1987, 13 peacekeeping operations were deployed, while in the 1990s alone, 35 were conducted. From 1989 to 1994, the number of peacekeepers increased from 11,000 to 75,000, at an annual cost of 3.6 billion dollars (Adebajo 2011; Koops et al. 2017). However, despite grand expectations that peacekeepers would fill the security void in Africa left by the superpowers, the 1990s were marked by repeated failures of the United Nations in global peacekeeping. Operations in Somalia, Angola, and Rwanda served as prime examples of the UN's disastrous performance (Badmus 2015; Adebajo and Landsberg 2000).

The UN mission in Somalia (UNITAF and UNOSOM II) was deemed a disaster because there was no agreement between the parties, meaning there was no peace to keep. Consequently, the mission ended up supporting one side of the conflict. In 1993, after the death of 18 US soldiers in the event known as the "Black Hawk Down" incident, the UN terminated the mission, withdrawing all troops from the African country (Badmus 2015). In Angola, the UN (UNAVEM III) failed to establish a post-election ceasefire and quickly withdrew when violent conflict resumed (Hirst 2009). The conflict in Rwanda, however, marked this phase, during which the UN and international powers abandoned the country just before the genocide of approximately 800,000 people. Following the events in Rwanda, the defense of neutrality in the face of grave violations, such as genocide, was reconsidered within international organizations (Akopari, Ndinga-Muvumba, and Murithi 2008).

According to Badmus (2015), the fundamental problems of UN Peacekeeping Operations in Africa can be explained in the context of how the UN's peacekeeping was conceptualized – the Triad<sup>10</sup> – and the inapplicability of these rules to the complex nature of African conflicts, which are intra-state and highly violent, targeting civilian populations. Similarly, a lack of adequate understanding of the internal dynamics and contexts of each region can result in the imposition of an economic, social, and cultural model that further inflames the conflict, making the UN part of the conflict (Badmus and Jenkins 2019; Autesserre 2014).

Moreover, when analyzing Peacekeeping Operations in Africa, Adebajo (2011) emphasizes the importance of political consensus among the three levels of involvement. For the author, more than issues related to technical, operational, and logistical limitations, political disputes among internal, regional, and external interveners are more significant in determining success or failure in conflict

8. The first United Nations peacekeeping mission took place in 1956 in Egypt during the Suez Canal Crisis. The first large-scale intervention occurred four years later, also in Africa, during the civil war in the DRC, marking the beginning of significant failures for the organization on the continent (Bellamy and Williams 2021).

9. The first generation of Peacekeeping Operations began shortly after the establishment of the UN and became known as traditional peacekeeping. These missions were involved in patrolling, monitoring, and supporting peace agreements and ceasefires. They consisted solely of lightly armed military troops, and the use of force was only triggered in self-defense, known as the "second shot." According to Badmus (2015), the central objective of these operations was to help build trust in the peace process. To achieve this, they conflict), and non-use of force (except in self-defense).

10. The triad is the term used to refer to the three foundational principles of peacekeeping operations: consent, impartiality, and minimal use of force (Bellamy and Williams 2021).

management. Additionally, he highlights the central role of the Security Council, which can influence all three levels, depending on the particular interests of the P-5.

Technically deficient peacekeeping missions can still succeed with strong political support, while the most technically brilliant peace operations are likely to be undermined by a lack of political commitment on the part of key national, regional, and external actors. The UN succeeded in Namibia, Mozambique, and, eventually, in Sierra Leone and Burundi, despite logistical and financial constraints, while well-resourced missions in Somalia and Angola (the UN Angola Verification Mission [UNAVEM III]) were spectacular failures (Adebajo 2011, 7).

These problems led to a significant decrease in the number of UN operations in Africa, almost reaching zero by 1997. By 1999, only 19,000 peacekeepers were active worldwide. This vacuum created room for action, which would be filled by African regional organizations, as we will see below, transforming the regional level of analysis of these operations (Adebajo and Landsberg 2000).

From 1995, as a consequence of the problems faced in Africa, a series of changes in UN Peacekeeping Operation regulations began. Important African figures would lead these transformations within the United Nations. The Egyptian Boutros Boutros-Ghali and the Ghanaian Kofi Annan, who served as Secretaries-General from 1992 to 2006, along with Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi and Sudanese academic diplomat Francis Deng, conducted some of the most important conceptual debates and initiatives on peacekeeping and UN interventions after the Cold War. Boutros-Ghali's Agenda for Peace Supplement, launched in 1995, initiated this period, reevaluating the organization's actions. With the creation of the Lessons Learned Unit (LLU), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), established in 1992, expanded its bureaucracy, providing a kind of "memorial" on the operations carried out. However, with the study on the operation in Rwanda, the LLU faced several criticisms from experts in the field, as it attempted to cover up and justify the organization's and the USA's failures (Bellamy and Williams 2021; Adebajo 2011; United Nations 1995).

Kofi Annan's arrival at the UN Secretariat in 1997, coming from the position of DPKO director, gave new impetus to the revision of conflict resolution mechanisms. The "Brahimi Report" of 2000, coordinated by the Algerian diplomat, examined the minimum conditions necessary for mission planning and execution, developing a grand strategy for these missions based on the reports of independent commissions on the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda (United Nations 2000). In this regard, the Third Generation of Peacekeeping Operations began, characterized by multidimensionality. The three principles of action - impartiality, consent, and legitimate defense - were questioned and relativized. While military emphasis and peace enforcement were deemed essential for civilian protection, consent and impartiality could be discarded for more effective action (Ferreira 2014). In 2008, the DPKO released the document known as the Capstone Doctrine, which became the highest doctrinal piece in the UN peacekeeping system (Bigatão 2014).

Another consequence of the debate on the UN's role in African internal conflicts was the emergence of the idea of "Humanitarian Intervention," widely promoted by Annan. Based on the concept of "sovereignty as responsibility" by Francis Deng, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Internally Displaced Persons between 1992 and 2004 and appointed Special Adviser to the Secretary-General for the prevention of genocide in 2007, the possibility of entering another country's territory to protect the civilian population before an imminent humanitarian disaster, even without the consent of that country's representatives, began to be discussed within the UN (Adebajo 2011). Supporting this new type of intervention, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), supported by the Government of Canada, created the concept of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in 2005. In this sense, the debate on international security shifted its focus to Human Security, instead of National Security, based on sovereignty, which was now being relativized. The use of armed military forces was also accepted for the imposition of civilian protection (Hirst 2009; Ferreira 2014; Schmidt 2018).

Behind all the criticisms of the R2P concept is the debate between "selective" and "collective" security. According to Hirst (2009), UN interventions prove to be selective, and their criteria are ambiguous: they are not linked to the gravity, risks, or magnitude of actions, meaning they are neither quantitative nor qualitative. What can be observed from the adoption of these interventions to this day is that the strategic interests of major powers were a decisive part of their establishment. These interests include both the region or country in question and the willingness to provide necessary resources for this purpose (Hirst 2009; Schmidt 2018; Adebajo 2011).

Once again, Africa serves as an example of this type of action and, more importantly, its consequences. UN Security Council Resolution 1973, which established a No-Fly Zone in Libya under NATO command in 2011, relied on the principle of Responsibility to Protect, ostensibly to protect the Libyan population from violence commanded by Muammar Gaddafi. However, aside from acting only in support of rebel forces (thus acting partially), it became clear in NATO's withdrawal after Gaddafi's death, even without a cessation of violence, that the operation's goal was the removal of the Libyan leader from power, the so-called "regime change." Nothing has been done since, leading Libya into an even greater civil war currently<sup>11</sup>, with severe human rights violations (Eyal 2012; Visentini 2022).

Currently, five UN Peacekeeping Operations<sup>12</sup> are active on the continent. The most numerous and largest UN peacekeeping missions in the world are currently in Africa. Many of the UN's socioeconomic and humanitarian efforts are located in Africa, with sub-regional offices in West Africa, the Great Lakes region, and Central Africa, as well as peacebuilding offices in Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, Central African Republic (CAR), Sierra Leone, and Burundi. Approximately 80% of UN forces are deployed in Africa today: over 40,000 soldiers and 6,000 civilians. Furthermore, about a third of the matters discussed in the UN Security Council relate to the African continent. On an annual average, 60% of the UN Security Council's meetings dealt with conflicts on the continent, and almost half of the 50 UN peacekeeping missions in the post-Cold War era occurred in Africa (United Nations 2023; Adebajo 2011; Wapmuk and Akinkwotu 2017). It is clear, therefore, that the UN's actions have had a direct impact on the construction of regional capacities for African conflict management, as we will delve into further below.

#### 4. The African Peace and Security Architecture

In the face of conflict and the extensive presence of peacekeeping operations in Africa, the creation of a regional security system emerged as a key agenda in African cooperation and integration discussions, starting as early as the establishment of the OAU in 1963. The ideology of Pan-Africanism instilled a sense of self-confidence among African nations, serving as the political and ideological basis for African integration and cooperation (Pereira 2016b; Wallerstein 2005; Landsberg 2019).

However, the OAU did not effectively respond to the continent's security demands. With a state-centric perspective rather than a supranational one, the OAU emphasized decolonization and the strengthening of African states, opting for a policy of "non-intervention" (Chazan et al. 1999; Wallerstein 2005; Akokpari, Ndinga-Muvumba, and Murithi 2008). Consequently, this approach weakened the organization's ability to address the considerable number of conflicts, especially those

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11. Regime changes through the so-called Color Revolutions, as seen in the Libyan case, sometimes lead to unconventional civil wars. These conflicts are conceptualized by Korybko (2015) as Hybrid Wars: a model that begins with the "implementation of a Color Revolution as an attempt at a soft coup, which is then followed by a hard coup through unconventional warfare if the first attempt fails" (Korybko 2015, 13). This is believed to be the new political-military tactic of the United States to replace governments not aligned with its policies in the 21st century, as seen in Ukraine and Syria.

12. The UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) since 2010; the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) since 2011; the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) also since 2011, all related to the independence of South Sudan; the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) since 2014, which succeeded the African Union International Support Mission in the Central African Republic, and the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) since 1991 (United Nations 2024).



of an intrastate nature, which proliferated on the continent in the 1980s and 1990s (Moolakkattu 2010; Murithi 2008). Similarly, as observed, the UN proved incapable of resolving African conflicts and engaged in a series of peacekeeping failures in Africa in the 1990s (Badmus 2015). As a result, international changes, marked by the end of the Cold War, and the UN's failure to maintain peace on the continent, coupled with the OAU's inability to actively respond to internal demands, led to the exploration of new alternatives for African problems (Akokpari, Ndinga-Muvumba, and Murithi 2008).

According to Adebajo and Landsberg (2001), the first response to the failures of the 1990s came with what they termed the "regionalization of peace processes in Africa." The 1990s in Africa were marked by the involvement of African regional organizations seeking to fill the void left by the UN and superpowers. Notable efforts during this period included the actions of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the Liberian and Ivorian Civil Wars, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in conflicts in Zimbabwe, the DR Congo, Madagascar, and Lesotho, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in conflicts in the Horn of Africa. These efforts renewed hopes for African integration. The OAU once again emerged as a significant actor, culminating at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s in the creation of the African Union (Adebajo 2008; Francis 2006; Nagaro and Nganje 2018).

The Constitutive Act of the African Union, launched in Lomé in July 2000, marked a paradigm shift in the security approach of the new African continental organization. The principle of "non-intervention," a hallmark of the old OAU, was altered to the principle of "non-indifference." According to Article 4 (h) of the Act, based on African human security and "sovereignty as responsibility," the AU (2001, 7) has "the right [...] to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity." Thus, for the AU, African states remain essential for the continent's security, but the security of individuals has also been prioritized, adopting a more interventionist stance (Akokpari, Ndinga-Muvumba, and Murithi 2008; Akokpari 2016; Hutchful 2008).

Additionally, an institutional framework for continental security operations was established within the organization. The "Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union," adopted in 2002, created what would be known as the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)<sup>13</sup>.

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13. In addition to the Act and the Protocol, APSA has a series of other documents that structure its operation. Adopted in February 2004, the African Common Defense and Security Policy (CADSP, acronym in English) is responsible for governing cooperation and integration in defense and security among African countries. Besides this, there is also the Protocol on the Rights of Women (2003), known as the Maputo Protocol, and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004), which bring the gender perspective into situations of conflict and post-conflict. Another important document is the Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Policy (PCRD, acronym in English), established in 2006, which outlines APSA's role in peacebuilding and consolidation (Badmus 2015).

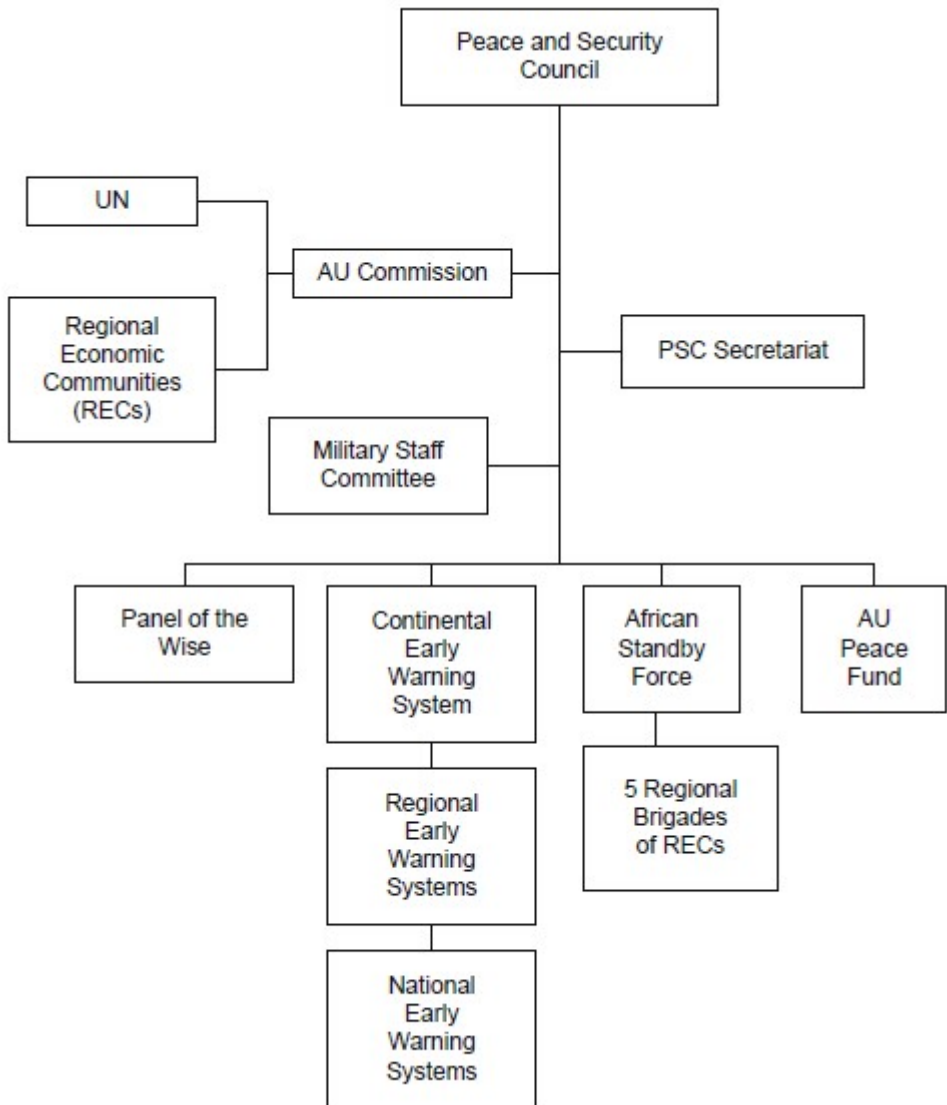


Figure 1 African Peace and Security Architecture (Badmus 2015, 87).

The Protocol establishes the Peace and Security Council (PSC) as the central decision-making body for security in Africa (African Union 2002). This functions as the highest security authority in Africa, with powers equivalent to those of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) at the continental level (Akopari 2016; Badmus 2015). It consists of 15 members, covering all African sub-regions, with no veto power or distinctions in their powers<sup>14</sup> (African Union 2002). The PSC quickly became an important political forum within the AU. Within a fifteen-year period, the PSC authorized and implemented more peace missions than the OAU did in almost thirty years. Examples include AMISOM<sup>15</sup> (African Union Mission in Somalia, 2007–2022), AMIB (African

14. However, even though there are no permanent members, it is worth noting Nigeria's presence in the PSC since its inception (Engel and Porto 2009).

15. The African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC) authorized, in January 2007, its largest peace operation to date, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). After 10 years in operation, a deadline for the mission's closure in 2020

Mission in Burundi, 2003–2004), and AMIS (African Mission in Sudan, 2004–2007) (Williams 2014). Additionally, the absence of a veto power makes the PSC more flexible, swift, and active in conflict prevention and resolution compared to the UNSC (Appiah 2018). However, the body faces several challenges, including the lack of coercive mechanisms, making the implementation of its decisions, even if binding, difficult (Karbo and Murithi 2018; Williams 2014).

Around the PSC, an organizational structure was built for the implementation of its decisions (see Figure 1), collectively referred to as the "Pillars of APSA," which includes the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early Warning System, the African Standby Force, and the Peace Fund (Engel and Porto 2009; Santos 2011).

The Panel of the Wise focuses on preventive diplomacy and its main function is mediation and conflict prevention. Only in November 2007 was the Panel created and institutionalized, defining its functions and objectives. The Panel is composed of five eminent African personalities<sup>16</sup> from various segments of society, with notable contributions to the cause of peace, security, and development on the continent. In less than ten years, the Panel deliberated and acted in crisis situations in the Central African Republic, Somalia, Mauritania, Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Sudan, and South Africa. Thus, its proactive role in conflict prevention, considering its relatively short existence, and in comparison to other components of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) that received significant attention and resources, demonstrates the importance of its role in APSA (Badmus 2015; Porto and Ngandu 2015).

The Continental Early Warning System operates through various indicator analyses and report generation, aiming to develop effective responses to prevent escalating violence or humanitarian disasters on the continent (Cilliers 2008). Presently, automatic data collection and dissemination are in operation. Like the African Standby Force, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) also have their early warning systems, cooperating with the AU (Santos 2011). Challenges mainly revolve around the lack of direct linkage between early warning and decision-makers' responses. Additionally, the constantly changing dynamics of conflicts in Africa affect data collection, often rendering them outdated or unsuitable for the situation (Behabtu 2011).

Alongside the PSC, the African Standby Force (ASF) is a key component of the organization. According to Santos (2011, 121), of all the components of the African Peace and Security Architecture, it is "the most complex and requires the greatest human, material, and financial resources." However, without the ability to rapidly deploy peace missions in crisis situations, the Architecture would lose its potential, potentially becoming irrelevant. Therefore, the ASF's primary objective is to provide the AU with conflict response capabilities by deploying support or intervention forces, as outlined in Articles 4 (h) and (j) of the Constitutive Act (Karbo and Murithi 2018; African Union 2001; Cilliers 2008).

The ASF consists of Regional Forces from the AU's five sub-regional blocs. In addition to military contingents, it includes police forces and civilian segments, totaling 40,000 contingents across the continent (Akokpari 2016). Its main challenges are related to logistical support infrastructure and the varying levels of evolution of forces in different regions. As operationalization was not possible until 2015, the AU decided in 2013 to create a provisional force called the African Immediate Crisis Response Capability (CARIC)<sup>17</sup> (Karbo and Murithi 2018; Williams 2014).

Funding for APSA and AU-conducted peace missions comes from the Peace Fund, which receives

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was established in 2017. In November 2019, during a meeting held in Nairobi, a plan was established to guide AMISOM's activities and operations for the period 2018–2021, marking the final phase of the AU Mission's transition and eventual withdrawal from Somalia. In 2022, the mission was officially concluded and replaced by the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) (Karbo and Murithi 2018; African Union 2023).

16. In order to strengthen the capacities of the Panel, in 2010 the AU General Assembly created the Friends of the Panel of the Wise Group, composed of all former members of the Panel, aimed at supporting the current members' activities (Porto and Ngandu 2015).

17. The CARIC consists only of military components, with 5,000 readily deployable soldiers from voluntary states, capable of intervening within 10 days, limited to Scenario 6 operations (Williams 2014).

donations from member states. However, this fund cannot cover all the expenses needed for APSA's full operation, often resorting to external financing, primarily from Western powers. This financial challenge is one of the AU's major problems, as it can create a new dependency nexus with these countries. Since 2017, the organization has been seeking solutions to this financial issue through a new institutional reform, but without much progress (Karbo and Murithi 2018; Engel and Porto 2009; Appiah 2018).

The AU Constitutive Act (2001) also emphasizes the importance of the organization's relationship with African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and other international bodies. Both the UN and the RECs have roles within APSA's guidelines, and joint action is necessary for the effective promotion of peace in Africa (Moolakkattu 2010).

The RECs<sup>18</sup> are part of APSA, and their actions must pass through the continental organization (Karbo and Murithi 2018). In 2008, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) established the principles, rights, and obligations between the AU and the RECs regarding security matters: subsidiarity and the primary responsibility of the AU. Within APSA, the AU took primary responsibility for maintaining peace, security, and stability in Africa, while sub-regional organizations functioned as its structuring elements, thus building a network of African peacekeeping capacity (Badmus 2015; Karbo and Murithi 2018).

Cooperation between the AU and the UN in security matters has been frequent since the early 2000s but with limited effective results. In addition to the UN Charter (Chapter VIII) envisaging this form of collaboration, other significant documents, such as Boutros Boutros-Ghali's Agenda for Peace (1992), projected cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations (Karbo and Murithi 2018; Moolakkattu 2010). However, this need gained strength due to the challenges faced by the UN in the 1990s, as the P-5s did not want to sponsor new failures like those in Somalia. The conclusion that the UN lacks the material resources, personnel, and capacities to Cooperation between the AU and the UN in security matters has been frequent since the early 2000s but with limited effective results. In addition to the UN Charter (Chapter VIII) envisaging this form of collaboration, other significant documents, such as Boutros Boutros-Ghali's Agenda for Peace (1992), projected cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations (Karbo and Murithi 2018; Moolakkattu 2010). However, this need gained strength due to the challenges faced by the UN in the 1990s, as the P-5s did not want to sponsor new failures like those in Somalia. The conclusion that the UN lacks the material resources, personnel, and capacities to quantitatively and qualitatively respond to current international peace and security demands led to abstaining from certain conflicts that do not directly interest its decision-makers (Francis 2006; Adebajo 2011).

Institutionally, the UN has been advocating for greater support to the AU since its creation in 2002<sup>19</sup>. The AU also recognizes the importance of its relationship and cooperation with the world organization. The PSC Protocol establishes guidelines for this partnership, and other documents, such as the Declaration on enhancing UN-AU cooperation: framework for the ten-year Capacity-Building Programme for the African Union (2006), envisage capacity building for the AU in the area of peace and security (Engel 2018). Presently, this cooperation occurs through consultations, diplomatic and operational support for regional operations, financing, as well as the promotion of joint or co-deployed operations (such as the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur – UNAMID, terminated in 2020). However, this support is ad hoc, as no comprehensive long-term funding, partnership, or training program has been approved by the Security Council. The P-

18. The AU recognizes eight RECs: the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); the Southern African Development Community (SADC); the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU); the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS); the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD); the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA); the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD); and the East African Community (EAC). Due to the considerable number of RECs and their overlapping memberships (many states are part of more than one REC), the AU decided not to accept new sub-regional organizations under its framework (Karbo and Murithi 2018).

19. Both the 2005 Annan report and the December 2004 UN High-Level Panel report advocated for financial support from the UN to African regional organizations.

5s wish to maintain the flexibility to decide on a case-by-case basis (Adebajo 2011). Frequently, regional operations are implemented first, and are later replaced by UN operations, which is often characterized as “AU first, UN later” (as seen in Burundi and Mali) (Engel 2018). However, this results in a reversal of responsibility, where organizations lacking capacities, such as the AU, are left to act initially, without certainty of international support for their continuation. Again, we emphasize that the interests of decision-makers are more relevant to the implementation and effectiveness of an operation than material capacities (Adebajo 2011). Similarly, these interests impact the actions of African countries in the Security Council. Often, decisions of the AU were not advocated by African leaders in UN votes; instead, this contributed to a perception of weakness within the organization (Schmidt 2018).

## 5. Conclusion

This article investigates the reasons behind the creation of a collective security framework in the African continent and the institutional characteristics and operations of this architecture. Firstly, three points were considered to explain why it was created: i) the presence of a considerable number of conflicts, especially in the 1990s, with unique characteristics; ii) international responses, primarily focused on the United Nations, which were mostly unsuccessful; and iii) the existence of a process of integration and cooperation in this sector since the independence processes with the OAU, linked to pan-African ideology. Thus, the first two sections analyzed the causes and characteristics of wars in Africa and the role of the United Nations in these situations. Finally, we analyzed the creation of the AU and its APSA, as well as its prospects for action in African conflicts from 2002, highlighting the fundamental role of the OAU and the pan-Africanist ideal.

The nature of African conflicts poses a significant challenge for the APSA. Understanding the causes of these disputes is essential for effective action in peace maintenance and consolidation. However, the complex wars in Africa cannot be reduced to a single specific cause. Their roots are multidimensional and involve political, economic, social, cultural, and historical factors, both external and internal, which were already present but were highlighted and exacerbated during violent conflicts. Without addressing these fundamental causes of conflicts, the AU provides only a palliative response. Furthermore, the analysis of state building in Africa, which has its own specificities, demonstrates that the use of generic recipes for “good governance” or “new democratic institutions” does not address the fundamental causes of its conflicts. The imposition of external structures, as occurred during colonialism, only deepens these divergences even further.

While the OAU advocated for sovereignty and territorial integrity (non-intervention), the AU adopts a more interventionist approach, guided by the principle of non-indifference (to African issues) – in response to the conflicts in 21st-century Africa. African governments realized that their national interests were often at stake in power struggles elsewhere on the continent, and the spillover of war across borders affected the entire Africa. Thus, civil wars and the collapse of some states weakened the non-intervention principle. With this new posture, the new continental organization created a broad framework to act in all phases of conflict.

The AU also demonstrates more flexibility politically and institutionally than the United Nations, producing responses that are faster and more adaptable to the African context. The decision not to have veto power, along with a regional position closer to conflict scenarios, gives the AU a leadership role and prominence in continental security today. Therefore, the AU’s security structure – the APSA – was designed for it to act in particular, complex, and multilayered situations more quickly and effectively compared to the United Nations. This appropriation of African challenges within the organization allowed proactive action in the 21st century.

However, there is a gap between the AU’s aspirations and its effective implementation capabilities. The lack of political will from African states, not providing resources (financial and human), such as troops for missions, is one of the organization’s main challenges. The absence of a total commitment

from the states renders the APSA empty at its core. In the same vein, the key role of leading states, such as South Africa and Nigeria, in the evolution and realization of AU efforts should be emphasized. Thus, African leaders need to engage more with the APSA, not only in rhetoric but in practical actions to achieve the intended objectives.

It is essential to note that the UN has even more capabilities to promote African initiatives, both financially and through its experiences. In this sense, the partnership in peacekeeping between the AU and the UN should be developed as complementary, as has been happening in peacekeeping missions. However, it should be more planned and institutionalized to provide long-term gains for both sides. Nevertheless, even though the objectives of the UN and the AU are convergent in most cases, they still have many differences in understanding a peacekeeping mission and acting in Africa. In many cases, such as in Sudan and Libya, the two organizations disagreed on how to act. With the increasing disputes between global power axes on African soil, the expectation of how the AU will be able to act intensifies. To what extent does the AU have its own guidelines or is it under the Western umbrella? Therefore, even if a partnership with the UN is institutionalized, the AU must always prioritize its initiatives and methods of action, defending African solutions for African problems.

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