FOI Studies in African Security

The African Peace & Security Architecture in motion
Institutional reforms, geopolitics, and finance

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The African Union's strategic framework, the African Peace and Security Architecture, APSA, has failed to live up to its initial ambition of becoming a key structure for responding to and solving conflict in Africa. Increasingly complex conflict dynamics as well as an apparent lack of political will and lack of financial autonomy have generated a trend of more ad hoc solutions, undermining the framework's initial design. Two decades after its establishment, both the African Union and the main financier of both it and the APSA, the European Union, have sought to change their role in the framework and increase its effectiveness. This memo seeks to understand what implications these changes will have on the ability of APSA-linked institutions to respond to conflicts in Africa.

For more than 20 years, the African Union (AU) has sought to become a more autonomous security provider in Africa through its African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).[1] Major international donors, such as the European Union – the AU's and APSA's largest source of funding – also support this ambition. Nevertheless, an endemic donor reliance, lack of political will, and poor governance have hampered APSA's effectiveness. Although recent AU reforms have sought to address this, APSA is facing new challenges. These include a trend of more ad hoc interventions, parallel reforms at the EU level, and a changing world order in which European nations are recalibrating their presence in Africa, while refocusing their attention inward and towards their eastern neighbourhood. Meanwhile, African armed conflicts are continuing to expand and intensify, and requiring robust and coordinated responses from international actors.

Against this backdrop, this memo analyses the emerging challenges to APSA and the AU's efforts to reform with the following research question: What capacity does a changing APSA have to intervene in conflicts in Africa?

Understanding APSA's role and ensuring its effective response is critical for policymakers, particularly those in major donor nations.[2] Historically, knowledge and understanding about APSA have been concentrated to policymakers and practitioners in APSA-linked institutions, a small group of counterparts within donor organisations, and academics. There is poor public awareness among Africans about what the AU and its partner organisations do. In part, this is due to a general opacity of information, lack of public outreach, and slow-moving processes at the AU level. As such, research for this memo has relied on a combination of primary and secondary sources, as well as a number of interviews with APSA specialists.

The memo answers the research question in three parts. Firstly, it defines APSA, outline its historical relevance, and provides an overview of APSA's Peace Support Operations and their recent developments. Secondly, it outlines the institutional and financial reforms relevant to APSA that the AU has initiated since 2017. Thirdly, it outlines the relevant EU reforms and the establishment of the European Peace Facility, EPF, amid increased competition over funds, particularly following Russia's war against Ukraine in 2022. The memo concludes by highlighting the current risks of the parallel reforms and assesses the potential impacts on the relationship between the EU and APSA-linked institutions in a time of significant uncertainty. In conjunction with this memo going to press, FOI is publishing an infographic about APSA that serves as a snapshot of the framework.

APSA: An evolving structure

The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) was one of the key novelties that resulted from the formation of the African Union (AU) in 2002. Emerging in the aftermath of grave human atrocities in Africa during the 1990s, such as the Rwandan genocide and civil

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war in Somalia, the AU's creation of the APSA signalled a paradigmatic shift away from the strictly intergovernmental Organisation of African Unity to a more supranational institution that is the AU. As such, this gave the organisations that form the APSA framework a stronger mandate to intervene in the internal affairs of sovereign nation-states through coercive means, including security and military operations and sanctions. Although the framework's design presented a clear path forward, APSA has remained in a continuous flux between ambitious institutionalism and pragmatic compromise, balancing between a will to establish a clear institutional framework and obstruction by sovereign member states, as well as exogenous factors such as lack of funding and donor reliance. These challenges continue to affect two interrelated components of APSA: its ability to respond to armed conflict and the financing of such operations.

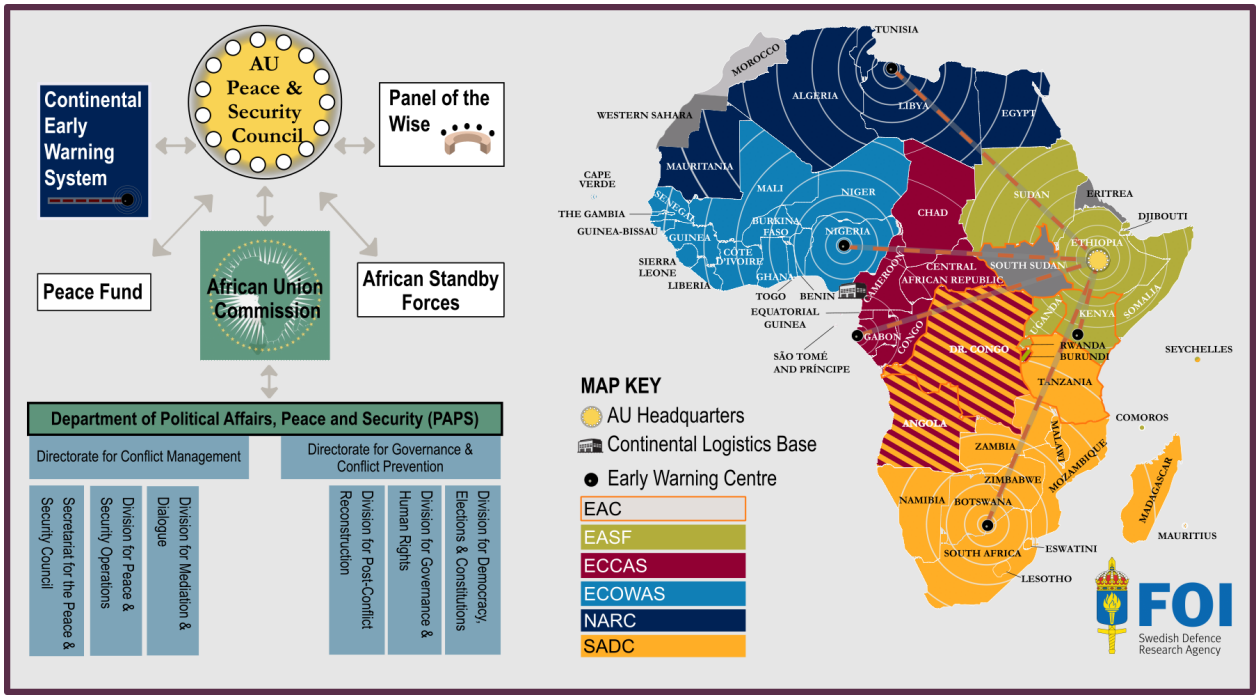
In a bid to improve the efficacy of its institutions, in 2018 the AU initiated a long-overdue process of institutional reforms, several of which remain in the implementation phase.[3] Intimately linked with these is the AU's quest to reduce its donor reliance by establishing a reliable and sustainable internal financing system. Central to both aspects of the reform process is the will to increase autonomy and ownership in policymaking.

Meanwhile, new Peace Support Operations (PSO), which form a critical part of the AU's peace and security activities and coercive action, have seen the light of day during the past six years. Rather than being driven by the AU, the PSOs have been carried out by Regional Economic Communities and ad hoc coalitions of the willing, as well as bilateral missions, including by Rwanda and Uganda.[4] While seeking to be pragmatic responses to emerging or expanding threats and conflicts across the continent, they also highlight cracks in the framework and a progressive turn towards ad hoc security interventions.[5]

Building an African peace and security architecture

On the surface, APSA appears to be a well-designed system that organises African efforts to provide peace and security in Africa. It is a constellation of institutions, with delegated responsibilities and shared ownership between the AU, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Regional Mechanisms (RMs), and ad hoc coalitions of the willing that identifies, seeks to prevent, and responds to political conflict on the continent. It is also a normative system that promotes democracy, good governance, and human rights, among other things, and imposes political and financial sanctions in the event of non-compliance or unconstitutional power grabs.

At the AU level, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) constitutes the centrepiece of APSA, supported by five pillars that form the framework: the African Union Commission (AUC), the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the Panel of the Wise, the Peace Fund (PF), and the African Standby Forces (ASF). While the



Figur 1: APSA's institutional design and the regional division of ASFs

AUC and PF are continental in character, each of the other pillars are supported by regional components managed by the eight RECs and several RMs (see Figure 1).[6]

The RECs are pre-existing regional organisations while RMs are specially designed mechanisms aimed at filling a specific capacity gap. The former include the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, the Community of Sahel-Saharan States, the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Each of these RECs have varying degrees of integration and an overlapping membership of states. The latter include the East African Standby Force (EASF) and the North African Regional Capability (NARC, highlighted in navy blue and light green, in Figure 2). Nominally, the RECs and RMs provide an operational network for security interventions, while the AU is responsible for coordination through its various pillars.[7]

In addition to these formal institutions, ad hoc initiatives have emerged during the past seven years that seek to provide a pragmatic response to transnational threats and conflicts to which the institutional framework has been unable to respond to effectively.[8] To some extent, these initiatives seek to fill a gap caused by the inability of the RECs & RMs to intervene through their respective ASFs. In some cases, this is due to a lack of political will from individual member states. In others, initiatives have emerged due to the transregional character of a specific threat, making the response of an individual REC & RM inaccurate.[9] The ad hoc coalitions of the willing include the Joint Force of the Group of Five Sahel countries (known by its acronym in French, FC-G5S), the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF), in the Lake Chad Basin, and the Accra Initiative.[10] The former two have mounted military operations against jihadist groups operating in border areas between the countries of their member states, while the latter is much more recent and aims to increase intelligence-sharing between littoral West African states. The MNJTF provides a transregional response to the threat brought by Boko Haram, the historical Islamist insurgency that emerged in northeastern Nigeria, an ECOWAS member, but expanded to the border regions of ECCAS members Cameroon and Chad. Rather than establishing a joint ECCAS-ECOWAS operation, the MNJTF appeared as a more targeted and pragmatic option emerging through the Lake Chad Basin Commission. Meanwhile, the FC-G5S aims to fill a capacity gap to respond to the Sahelian threat to which ECOWAS – an organisation of 15 West African states – proved inadequate to address. Partly, this is because neither Chad nor Mauritania are members of ECOWAS.

Balancing ambitions and results

Despite its laudable objectives, APSA remains imperfect and incomplete. The obvious demonstration of this is its inconsequential response to conflicts in Africa, despite the clear rules of engagement expressed in formal decisions by the AU and RECs. Some of its failures are internal and akin to broader development challenges across Africa, such as lack of funding and unstable financing, capacity gaps, and governance issues. Others reflect the complexities of conflict more broadly, but in Africa specifically. Indeed, Africa has long been an epicentre of violent conflict. According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, Africa accounted for 25 out of 54 state-based conflicts around the world in 2021.[11] By the same token, Africa-related issues occupy the lion's share of UN Security Council meetings, outcome documents, and resolutions.[12]

Another criticism directed towards APSA relates to the willingness, or ability, of its constituent parts to respond to some conflicts, or coups d'état, but not others; the varying ways in which APSA-linked institutions have responded to coups throughout the Sahelian strip, from Sudan in the east to Mali in the west, during the past four years are a case in point. Following Mali's coup d'état in 2021, the second in a year, ECOWAS imposed extensive economic sanctions on the junta-led government, while the AU and the Group of Five Sahel (G5S) countries suspended Bamako's membership to their respective organisations. In comparison, their resolve was less pronounced after Chad's late president, Idriss Déby Itno, was killed in battle and unconstitutionally succeeded by his own son, Mahamat. Furthermore, neither Burkina Faso nor Guinea experienced the same weight of immediate sanctions from ECOWAS following military coups there, although sanctions on the latter were subsequently expanded.

Notwithstanding these challenges, APSA has had some achievements, of which there are several recent notable examples. One is the AU's role in mediating the peace agreement between the federal government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).[13] Notwithstanding the fact that there was an agreement that so far appears to be holding ground, the AU and IGAD have been heavily criticised for appearing to drag their feet and applying insufficient pressure on

the belligerents to bring about a cessation of hostilities in the deadliest conflict on the continent between 2020 and 2022. The comparatively low number of occasions when the AU, compared to the UN Security Council, discussed the Tigray conflict is one indication of this.[14] Other critics contend that the peace deal was a victor's agreement, emerging only after the Ethiopian federal forces had made critical gains against the significantly degraded Tigrayan Defence Forces, the TPLF's military wing, unblocking several sticking points in the third quarter of 2022.[15] Despite these criticisms, the AU's active involvement prior, during, and after the peace talks in Pretoria remains noteworthy. The AU also continues to oversee the implementation of the peace deal.[16]

Another notable example is that some of the RECs that sit within APSA are highly active in responding to conflicts, including civil unrest and armed hostilities, in their respective regions. ECOWAS has historically been the most active in this respect, having deployed a series of stabilisation and monitoring missions to West African countries experiencing political upheaval over the past two decades. Recent examples include The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau (see Table 1). SADC has also been active in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and, since 2021, in northern Mozambique.

Although the AU initially sought to establish a clear and effective system for rapid responses of varying severity through the African Standby Forces (ASFs), RECs and ad hoc coalitions of the willing have in effect carried out that function. Nominally, the ASFs are intended to be multi-dimensional forces that would be operationalised by each REC or RM designated to them. These contingents should be independent of national command structures and ready to deploy within a short timeframe of no more than 90 days, depending on the severity of the event as determined by the AU's six scenarios for conflicts and missions.[17] The ASFs, themselves, are composed of a regional force headquarters, a Continental Logistics Base, in Douala, Cameroon (see Figure 1), and Rapid Deployment Capabilities; although the Continental Logistics Base has been inaugurated, the rate of operationalisation of the Rapid Deployment Capabilities is less clear.[18] Furthermore, deployment of the ASFs remains highly dependent on the willingness and operationalisation of each REC & RM.[19]

As such, the ASFs have effectively deployed only rarely due to difficulties in operationalising the contingents. Even though the AU has deemed the ASFs operational, national governments and RECs have been reluctant to use them. Instead, some RECs, such as ECOWAS, have acted independently of an explicit AU mandate or ASF structure. Its stabilisation mission in The Gambia is an example of this. Although the West African bloc requested AU authorisation for its deployment, it did so after authorising the force itself.[20] The departure from theoretically designed standby forces to ad hoc, pragmatic solutions has been a growing trend over the past decade, a phenomenon that is further discussed in the following section.

Peace Support Operations in Africa: From designed responses to ad hoc solutions

African-led Peace Support Operations (PSOs), most of which have had a broad stabilisation mandate, form a critical part of APSA's functions. Due to the complexity of conflict in Africa, whereby multifaceted ideological and transnational insurgencies have taken root, most PSOs have been equipped with multi-pronged mandates ranging from stabilisation, counterterrorism, capacity-building, and police enforcement (see Table 1, below). However, PSOs are by no means the framework's only mode of engagement. Other actions include monitoring, early warnings, diplomacy, mediation, and post-conflict reconstruction. Ideally, and according to APSA's design, these functions would kick in at different stages of any political conflict, directed from any of the AU-led or mandated institutions. For the purposes of this memo, we dedicate this section to a deeper study of PSOs, which receive most of the European Peace Facility funds that are directed to Africa.

In its initial years, the AU mounted a series of PSOs and mediation efforts. During the first decade of the 2000s, the AU played an active and leading role in crisis-resolution efforts in countries such as Burundi, the Comoros, and Sudan, and it continues to be the central actor in its African Union Transition Mission in Somalia, ATMIS. The International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) was another African-led peace operation that was active in Mali prior to the deployment of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, MINUSMA, in 2013.

Nevertheless, the number of AU-led PSOs has declined over the past decade, with RECs or, in more recent years, ad hoc coalitions of the willing filling the gap.[21] This is not to say that RECs & RMs are less able to respond. Rather, the decisions leading to the establishment of ad hoc forces have been driven by pragmatism, compromise, or the principle of subsidiarity, in which the organisation or security actor most relevant (i.e., closest) to a specific conflict takes the lead. For instance, the Joint Force of the Group of Five Sahelian countries that was established in 2017 includes

three ECOWAS members as well as two non-ECOWAS members: Mauritania and Chad. However, the future of the operation has become uncertain since Mali left the group in 2022. In the same vein, the Multinational Joint Task Force of the Lake Chad Basin includes two countries from ECCAS and ECOWAS, respectively.

Through their numerous interventions in Africa, APSA-linked institutions have become central security building-blocks within the global security architecture, able to intervene in internal affairs of sovereign states. In 2019 and 2020, respectively, the AU, RECs and RMs responded to 17 and 19 conflicts.[22] These interventions included diplomatic outreach, mediation, and PSOs. Considering the latter, there were nine active APSA-linked PSOs as of December 2022 (see Table 1). By comparison, there are three major UN stabilisation missions on the continent: the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA); the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO); and MINUSMA (Mali).

A tenth PSO has been in the making since December 2022, when ECOWAS re-committed to establishing a regional force to intervene against insecurity, terrorism, and "to restore constitutional order in member countries."[23] The force of about 3000 troops will require USD100 million in funding, according to ECOWAS estimates. While further details are due to be announced during the first semester of 2023, ongoing efforts by the AU Peace and Security Council to achieve the deployment indicate a high likelihood of its materialising.[24] A potential eleventh PSO may also emerge this year, as signatories of the Accra Initiative in November 2022 called for the operationalisation of 10,000 troops in a new Multi-National Joint Task Force.[25]

As noted above, ECOWAS has historically been the most active REC, followed by SADC. And both continue to show the political will to play an active role in their respective regions. ECOWAS has deployed several stabilisation missions to member states experiencing extensive civil unrest and government instability, and currently has two such missions ongoing (see Table 1).

Table 1. African-led Peace Support Operations, December 2022

Mission	Main tasks	Troop-contributing countries	Configuration
ATMIS 2022–present, African Union Transition Mission in Somalia	Counterterrorism, protection of civilians, stabilisation, capacity-building, postconflict reconstruction and development.	Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Somalia.	AU and the Federal Government of Somalia
EACRF 2022–present, East African Community Regional Force	Stabilisation, capacity-enhancement, and ceasefire enforcement.	Kenya, Burundi, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.	Ad hoc coalition of the willing. Not yet authorised by the AU.
ECOMIG 2017–present, ECOWAS Mission to The Gambia	Stabilisation, capacity-building, and police enforcement.	Senegal, Ghana, Mali, Togo, and Nigeria.	ECOWAS Standby Force.
ECOMIB 2022–present, ECOWAS Stabilisation Support Mission in Guinea-Bissau	Stabilisation, maritime security, and police enforcement.	Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Senegal.	ECOWAS Standby Force.
FC-G5S 2017–present, Force Conjointe –Group of Five Sahel countries	Counterterrorism military response, capacity-building, early warning, and police enforcement.	Mali (withdrawn), Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger.	Ad hoc AU-authorised coalition of the willing.
MNJTF 2015–present, Multinational Joint Task Force for Lake Chad region	Counterterrorism military response, stabilisation programmes, and humanitarian operations.	Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, Chad, and Benin (non-combat capacity).	Ad hoc AU-authorised coalition of the willing.
SAMIM 2021–present, SADC Mission in Mozambique	Counterterrorism and peacemaking. Ground and naval forces.	South Africa (lead), Angola, Botswana, DR Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe	SADC Standby Force. Commended by AU decision 815 (February 2022).
Rwanda's intervention in northern Mozambique	Counterterrorism, patrolling, and police enforcement.	Rwanda	Commended by the AU Assembly decision 815 (February 2022).

Sources: Rock, Anna Ida. En utdragen exit – Somalias säkerhetssituation efter AMISOM. Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Institute (FOI), 2022. 'ECOWAS stabilisation force deployed in troubled Guinea Bissau.' Africanews. The joint force of the G5 Sahel. Durban: African Centre for the Resolution of Disputes (accord), 2018. Multinational Joint Task Force. About Us. SADC. SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) in brief. 10 November 2022. African Union Commission, Thirty-Fifth Ordinary Session, Decision 815. East African Community. Communique – The third heads of state conclave on the Democratic Republic of the Congo: The Nairobi process, 20 June 2022. Economic Community of West African States.

The planned 3000-troop force would make a third ongoing operation. In July 2021, SADC deployed a counterterrorism force to northern Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province to fight Islamic State-linked militants there. Prior to that, the political bloc deployed troops to the DRC and the Comoros. Other RECs have been less responsive. Neither ECCAS, EASF, IGAD, nor NARC have been able to effectively intervene in conflicts in their respective regions, including the post-2011 crisis in Libya and the Anglophone crisis in southwestern Cameroon where secessionist militants in 2017 launched an armed insurgency against the Francophone-led government. In some situations where RECs have failed or proven inadequate, ad hoc coalitions have, as mentioned above, filled the capacity gap. These include the FC-G5S and the MNJTF, as well as the Accra Initiative, all of which are based in West Africa and concerned with terrorism in the Sahel.

In addition, new actors are establishing new regional PSOs. In April 2022, the East African Community, an economic regional organisation that includes Burundi, DRC, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda, announced it would establish a regional intervention force to combat armed groups in the eastern DRC. Seven months later, the EAC Regional Force (EACRF) deployed some 2000 troops for an initial six months, although this deployment may be extended beyond that.[26] The EACRF includes contingents from five EAC members, who will respectively deploy across four Congolese provinces, with a coordination hub in Goma, managed by the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF); troops from Rwanda, which is also an EAC member, will not deploy in-country but will be stationed in areas bordering the DRC.[27]

Bilateral interventions have also seen the light of day during the past two years. At the request of Kinshasa, Uganda intervened against Islamic State-linked militants in the eastern DRC in 2021.[28] Neighbouring Rwanda has also mounted military operations abroad at the request of the Central African Republic and Mozambique. Benin has reportedly also requested material support from Rwanda in its fight against Islamist militants active in its northern regions of Atacora and Alibori. Although unconfirmed reports have speculated that Rwanda would deploy boots on the ground, Beninese officials have dismissed the claims and limited the partnership to logistical support.[29]

Common for all these missions is uncertainty around funding, which puts their long-term viability and effectiveness at risk. Although the European Council, in December 2022, approved EUR20 million in funding through the EPF to Rwanda's mission in Mozambique to enable the acquisition of collective and personal equipment, as well as strategic airlifts, it is unclear how long this funding will be available.[30] Equally, the EACRF's funding remains uncertain. The KDF's budget for six months is EUR37 million, which may be increased to EUR50 million over a year, but the required funds for other contingents remains unclear. The sources of the funding are also in question, although media reports have indicated that French President Emmanuel Macron has been discreetly lobbying to obtain EU support via the EPF.[31] Finally, ECOWAS has announced USD100 million in funding needs for its new regional force, but the sources for this sum also remain unclear.

Tightening the knots: Institutional and financial reforms

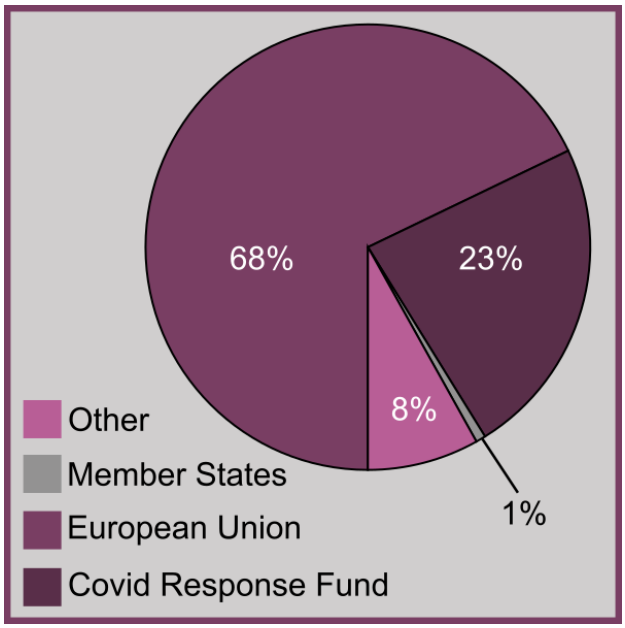
In a bid to improve efficiency and governance, in 2017 the AU launched a reform process to streamline the institutional set up. The then chairperson of the AU, Rwanda's President Paul Kagame, was tasked with proposing a set of institutional reforms the following year. In line with the recommendations of the reform commission he led, in 2021 the number of departments was reduced from eight to six, seeing the large Peace and Security department merged with that of the much smaller Political Affairs into the department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS). The AU also replaced an ineffective quota system with a meritocratic hiring policy. In addition, the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crisis (ACIRC),[32] another armed capability of APSA based on voluntary pledges of AU member states, was abolished in 2020, after the AUC declared that all ASFs had reached full operationalisation. Although not strictly part of Kagame's proposed reforms, this marked another important change to APSA. Despite being declared fully operational, the ASFs continue to suffer from a series of deficiencies relating to their capacity and capabilities.[33]

Furthermore, in a bid to reduce donor reliance and ensure greater autonomy, since 2015 the AU has implemented several financial reforms. Chief among these was the reinvigoration in 2016 of the endemically underfunded Peace Fund (PF), APSA's key financial tool. At the time, 98 percent of it was financed by external actors.[34] Seeking to raise USD400M by 2020, African leaders agreed to implement a 0.2 percent levy on imports into Africa that would fund 100 percent of the operational budget, 75 percent of the programme budget, and 25 percent of African-led PSOs.[35] As part of its operational and programme budget, the PF is intended to fully finance mediation and preventive

diplomacy activities, and institutional readiness and capacity, as well as maintaining a crisis reserve facility.[36] Additionally, the AU has adopted so-called 'Golden Rules', which aim to establish a minimum threshold for the budget and expenditure ceiling for member states, and revised its sanctions regime for non-compliant states, including a reduction of the time that a member state may be considered in default, from two years to six months.

The reinvigoration of the PF garnered some initial successes. Between 2016 and 2020, the average uptake reached 26 member states and the average collection rate reached 75 percent;[37] the highest rate was reached in 2018, while the lowest occurred in 2020, during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.[38] Furthermore, the share of defaulting member states had approximately halved to 15 percent in 2019, compared to a previous average of 33 percent per year.[39]

Despite the marginal improvements, EU funding accounted for 68 percent of the overall AU budget in 2020, while member-state contributions reached a meagre 1 percent (See Figure 1).[40] Other contributions came from the AU's Covid Response Fund, bilateral donors, such as South Korea (the largest bilateral contributor), Spain, the US, Germany, and the United Kingdom, as well as multilateral donors, such as the World Bank and non-governmental organisations, for example the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.



Figur 2: Share of the AU's sources of overall budget funding (2020)
Source: African Union, Taking Stock, Charting the Future: African Union Commission End of Term Report 2017–2021.

Furthermore, in the 2021 financial year external partners continued to finance more than 75 percent of the programme budget and virtually the entire AU-led PSO budget.[41] And, with regard to the PF, member states had collected no more than USD204.88 million in 2020, accounting for just over 50 percent of the initial target.[42] This points to APSA's continued reliance on external donors, reflective of the increased macroeconomic headwinds that many African countries face following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The cash-flow issues and lack of compliance by member states prompted the AU Commission to extend the implementation deadline for the PF to 2025. Nevertheless, this extension was granted prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the subsequent disruption to global supply chains of wheat, increased inflationary pressures and consequent rising interest rates in the US and Western markets. These factors indicate a realistic possibility of further implementation delays and financing challenges during the next two years, as member states seek to address their own economic woes. For instance, the vast majority of the 37 countries that the World Bank Group considers Heavily Indebted Poor Countries are located in Africa.[43] Zambia already defaulted on some of its debt in 2020, and Ghana did so in December 2022.[44] Other countries such as Kenya and Nigeria are also packing very high levels of government-guaranteed debt, which may constrain public expenditure and their ability or willingness to comply with the AU's budget targets.[45]

Changes from outside: The EU's new financing instruments

In parallel with the AU's reforms, the European Union, the main financier of APSA-linked institutions and operations, has changed the way it funds its external action and support. In 2021, the EU launched a new off-budget mechanism of EUR5 billion, for an initial period ending in 2027.[46] In effect, through the new European Peace Facility (EPF), which was the result of a merger of the African Peace Facility (APF) and the Athena Mechanism, the European bloc sought to create an effective tool to achieve its ambition of becoming a global security provider.[47]

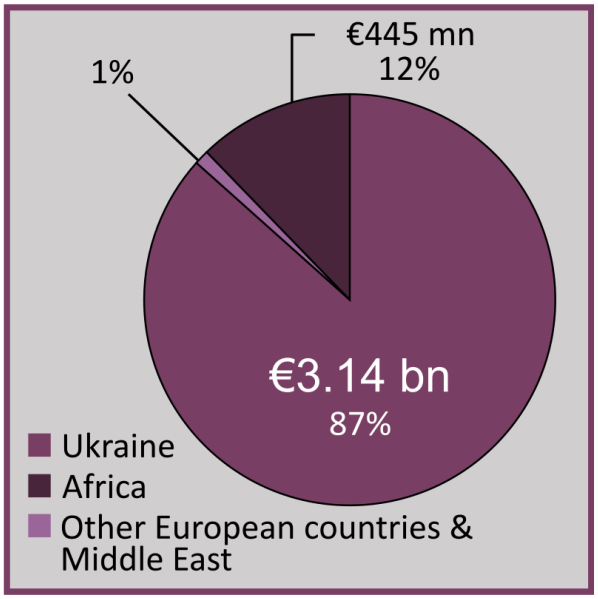
Broadly, this shift was due to internal calls to increase effectiveness of EU military training efforts, enhance EU leverage in partner states, and to counter growing competition from other regional powers such as Russia and Turkey, both of which provide training in African countries.[48] This sentiment was also supported by recommendations made by the European Court of

Auditors, the EU's external auditor, which in its 2018 audit of APF contributions to APSA concluded, among other things, that "the EU did not focus sufficiently on the transition away from paying salaries and towards capacity-building to ensure long-term success of EU support."[49] Although the EPF is not the only source of European funding for the AU and APSA, it is by far the largest. Other contributions include the so-called Joint Financing Agreements (JFAs). These are covered by the EU, alongside bilateral donors, such as Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, thus providing predictable financing to AU Liaison Offices and staff working within APSA pillars, including the Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department and the Panel of the Wise.[50]

While capacity gaps have historically haunted African organisations and initiatives funded by the APF, similar issues also applied to the EU's external action. For instance, despite an increase in allocated funds to regional organisations, "relevant regional EU delegations had not increased [their staffing] accordingly."[51] Furthermore, experiences from previous and ongoing EU Training Missions (EUTMs) in Africa had identified important challenges in providing effective training to local forces, particularly their lack of critical material, both non-lethal and lethal, and sometimes even the most basic equipment.[52] As such, the repackaged EU external support to train and equip partners seeks to address these technical deficiencies.

In the context of APSA, the EPF introduces three novelties vis-à-vis the APF. Firstly, it has a global reach and is thereby not limited to Africa. Secondly, funds can finance military support to countries not covered by the mandates of ongoing EUTMs. Funds may also be channelled directly to RECs & RMs and individual member states, thereby bypassing the AU. Thirdly, funds for capacity-building may be used to supply military infrastructure and lethal weapons.

Although the total sum of funds available through the EPF is about twice as large as those distributed through the APF, funds previously earmarked for the APF can be used for missions in other conflict environments.[53] This has increased concerns among African leaders that European partners are giving security on the continent a lower priority due to increased spending needs in Ukraine and eastern Europe.[54] Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the EU has provided significant funds and material support to the eastern European neighbour. In the EPF's second year, 86 percent of the overall financing ceiling for the 2021–27 period had already been reached, as disbursements to Ukraine far outstripped those made to the APF between 2004 and 2020.[55] As reserves rapidly dwindled, the EPF was expanded by EUR2 billion (or 40 percent) in December 2022, with more increases likely over the next four years, particularly as the war against Ukraine is likely to continue.[56] By comparison, the EU allocated EUR3.5 billion to the APF between 2003 and 2019.[57]



Figur 3: Share of EPF contributions by geographic zone
Source: European External Action Service (EEAS), The European Peace Facility (Fact Sheet), December 2022

The possibility of distributing EPF funds directly to RECs & RMs and ad hoc coalitions of the willing, as well as individual member states may, furthermore, undermine the supremacy of the AU within APSA. While the APF was previously restricted to funding African-led PSOs that the AU Peace and Security Council had authorised or endorsed, the new mechanism removes this rule. The concern is that a trend of ad hoc coalition-building will, in turn, become cemented and further complicate coordination, as well as the AU's relationship with its RECs & RMs. In turn, this may have broader implications for the global security architecture. Although the AU- and APSA-linked institutions have sought to become more autonomous through financial independence, they do not seek to become autonomous actors in and of themselves.

Conclusion

Since its formation, the AU has sought to become the leading security actor in Africa. Its main way of doing this has been through the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), which has sought to balance the capabilities of the AU with those of its supporting

Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Mechanisms (RMs).

Two broad points have undermined APSA's efficacy: lack of funding and governance issues. Although the AU is seeking to address both points through institutional and financial reforms, APSA remains financially constrained and highly reliant on external donors, in particular the EU. As such, any changes that affect the way the EU finances African Peace Support Operations are likely to have implications for APSA more broadly, and its constituent parts more specifically. The fact that European support, through the European Peace Facility, can be distributed directly to RECs, RMs, ad hoc coalitions of the willing, and individual African states means that the supremacy of the AU within APSA is at risk of being further hollowed out. This may, in turn, also have implications for the global security architecture, as choosing the continent's most relevant security partner will become more complicated.

To some extent, this process is already evident in the inconsequential response of the AU and the framework to armed conflicts on the continent; this has given rise to more ad hoc security missions as well as new regional and bilateral interventions that overlap and may supplant the design of APSA as we know it. The multiplication of actors is problematic for two main reasons. Firstly, it may undermine APSA's sought-after long-term solutions, as competition over funds in Africa is likely to increase. As a greater number of actors competes for funds, budgets for each mission will either shrink, or become smaller in scope, or for shorter periods of time. Consequently, interventions may become too militaristic, failing to address the underlying political drivers of the conflicts they are responding to. The knock-on effect may be that conflicts worsen on multiple levels. Focus may also shift more towards responding to conflicts than prevention. Secondly, the multiplication of actors may complicate governance and monitoring, as previously identified capability gaps, such as EU staffing and lack of material for African contingents, will remain unaddressed or worsen due to increasingly constrained budgets.

Finally, and because large funds are being distributed to enhance capacity and capabilities in Ukraine and eastern Europe, an underlying perception that African security is given a lower priority may increase. This may create resentment, but may also push African governments and institutions to seek support from other regional powers, such as China, Russia, and Turkey. To assuage concerns and maintain strategic relations on the continent, the EU may want to seek to reassure African partners that security issues on the continent remain a priority. While the EPF does bring some welcome flexibility in the way that the EU trains and supports partners, financial and material aid can be strengthened by adequate know-how and skills transfers. Furthermore, the EU can reflect more deeply about the potential, unintended consequences of diverting funds directly to RECs and individual member states, particularly when the AU has not yet endorsed such missions, or if those actors do not appear to be abiding by international humanitarian law, or protecting human rights. There have been allegations of such violations against both the Mozambican defence forces and troops forming part of the SADC mission in Cabo Delgado.[58] By the same token, the UN and the EU have both recognised Rwanda's active and material support for armed rebels in eastern DRC.[59]

Robust and regular governance controls and risk assessments need to be effectively maintained and accompanied by targeted advice on how to address any issues identified. Moreover, international partners can anticipate that needs will remain elevated in the long-term outlook. This assumption is based on the multiplication and intensification of conflicts on the continent as well as the serious macroeconomic headwinds that many governments on the continent are facing against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war against Ukraine. Should the EU fail to dampen African concerns, this will potentially pave the way for other regional powers, such as China, Russia, and Turkey to play a greater role, to the detriment of Western support.

In parallel, the AU as well as its partner organisations on the continent should seek to accelerate the process of clarifying their rules of engagement and partnerships, in a bid to expedite the effects of the 2017 reform process. Failing that task will likely receive negative attention among African partners, as Europe is increasing its focus and capabilities at home due to its extensive security concerns in its eastern neighbourhood. Furthermore, African leaders can strengthen their communication and outreach about the benefits of a changing framework, and emphasise the need for pragmatic responses to conflict. ■

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Endnotes

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