



POLICY BRIEF 3

Beating African Swords into Ploughshares: From Military Security to Human Security

Date of Publication:
February 2024

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1. Introduction

The Nordic Africa Institute (NAI) in Uppsala, Sweden; the University of Pretoria's Centre for the Advancement of Scholarship (CAS) in Pretoria, South Africa; and Trust Africa, Dakar, Senegal, jointly convened a research seminar entitled **"Beating African Swords into Ploughshares: From Military Security to Human Security"**. The meeting took place on 31 October and 1 November 2023 at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden, and involved members of the academic, policy, and civil society communities.

The seminar covered eight substantive sessions over two days including; Strengthening Africa's Security Architecture, and Tackling Military *Coups d'États* in Africa; Enhancing Africa's Role on the United Nations (UN) Security Council; The African Union's (AU) Right to Intervene, and the Role of Civilian Police in Peace Support Operations in Africa; A Life of Service: Experiences in Mediation, Humanitarian Action, and Diplomacy; Human Rights, Mass Atrocities, and Protecting Civilians in Africa; Promoting Climate Justice, and Decolonizing Liberal Peace and Security in Africa; Mediation Lessons, and Addressing the Scourge of Children and Armed Conflict in Africa; and Tackling Militant Groups in Africa.

2. Strengthening Africa's Security Architecture, and Tackling Military *Coups d'états* in Africa

The paradox of United Nations peacekeeping in Africa refers to the current reality in which, while African peacekeepers are more willing to undertake such missions, they often lack the capacity and resources to do so. UN peacekeepers deployed in Africa are much better resourced than regional peacekeepers, but often avoid dangerous enforcement missions to protect civilians due to the political risks entailed in such deployments. This situation is exacerbated by the political interests of external actors like France, Russia, and the United States (US) in Africa. Within this context, UN peacekeepers have faced credibility challenges as their first deployment to Africa failed to prevent the assassination of popular Congolese prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, in January 1961. Since then, Burundi, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, and Sudan, have all expelled UN peacekeepers from their territories, with Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) being the latest in 2023 to demand that the UN withdraw its troops from their countries. This expulsion of UN peacekeepers could, however, worsen political instability across the Sahel, the Great Lakes, and the Horn of Africa.

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PARTICIPANTS AT THE "BEATING AFRICAN SWORDS INTO PLOUGHSHARES: FROM MILITARY SECURITY TO HUMAN SECURITY" RESEARCH SEMINAR AT THE NORDIC AFRICA INSTITUTE, UPPSALA, SWEDEN, IN OCTOBER 2023.

IMAGE CREDIT - Nordic Africa Institute, Sweden



More positively, UN peacekeeping in Africa has helped to restore peace and democratic rule to Namibia, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone. African governments, however, doubt both the efficacy and intentions of external peacekeepers. The presence of French and American troops, as well as Russian-based Wagner mercenaries in countries such as Chad, Djibouti, Niger, Mali, and the Central African Republic (CAR) are often seen as more self-interested interventions rather than genuine efforts to strengthen Africa's security architecture.

This situation is further exacerbated by the recent spate of military *coups d'états* across the continent which has exposed the political instability that is inextricably linked with conflicts. These events are both a cause and a consequence of the failures of peacebuilding in Africa since the end of the Cold War era. Between 1960 and 1990, 72 military coups occurred in Africa. Despite the wave of democracy that swept across the continent in the 1990s, military coups returned in 2010. The most recent occurred in Chad in April 2021, Mali in May 2021, Guinea in September 2021, Sudan in October 2021, Burkina Faso in September 2022, Niger in July 2023, and Gabon in August 2023.

Military juntas have justified these coups by citing issues around insecurity, poverty, and inequality. The key reasons for these military putsches are, however, often related to the inability of successive African administrations to deliver public goods as dividends of democracy. The first generation of coups from the 1960s was triggered by a failure of democracy as a political philosophy in the African context. These failures, however, went unaddressed during the wave of democracy that occurred between the 1990s and the 2000s.

The 15-member UN Security Council – with primary responsibility for global peace and security – is inherently hierarchical, with a two-tiered system of membership, making it difficult for non-permanent members to influence major decisions.

US SECRETARY OF STATE ANTONY BLINKEN CHAIRS A HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL IN AUGUST 2023, IN NEW YORK.

IMAGE CREDIT - [Wikimedia Commons/Chuck Kennedy/Public Domain](#)



3. Enhancing Africa's Role on the UN Security Council

In order to strengthen the presence of the United Nations in Africa, the decision-making role of the continent within the world body should be urgently enhanced. The 15-member UN Security Council – with primary responsibility for global peace and security – is inherently hierarchical, with a two-tiered system of membership, making it difficult for non-permanent members to influence major decisions. The Council consists of five veto-wielding permanent members (P5) – the US, China, France, Russia, and Britain – alongside ten non-permanent members (E10), elected by the UN General Assembly for two-year terms. This has created an institutional imbalance that often results in unequal representation, with the veto-wielding P5 often dominating decision-making. Africa has three rotating seats – the Africa Three (A3) – on the Council. Although 84 per cent of UN peacekeepers are deployed in Africa and 60 per cent of its deliberations typically focus on Africa, the continent is not adequately represented on the Council and lacks veto power. Regardless, the A3 has increased coordination between the UN and the African Union, so that positions taken in Addis Ababa by the 15-member AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) are fed into the deliberations of the UN Security Council in New York.

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda is a major thematic issue prioritised by E10 states. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of October 2000 led to increased attention to women's participation in peace processes. Progress in Africa has taken the form of the development of national policies, and 32 states have crafted National Action Plans (NAPs). There is, however, a gap in implementation since, according to UN Women, in 2022, four of five UN-led or co-led peace processes had women participating as delegates or negotiators, but overall representation remains low.

4. The African Union's Right to Intervene, and the Role of Civilian Police in Peace Support Operations in Africa

Article 4(h) of the Africa Union Constitutive Act of 2000 empowers the continental body to intervene militarily in cases involving war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. The continental organisation is thus seeking to enhance its supranational powers, since decisions to intervene do not require prior authorisation from affected member states. Decisions on interventions are instead taken by the AU Peace and Security Council, following a two-thirds majority, in the absence of consensus.

Four factors have, however, often prevented this article from being efficiently employed. First, the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government make the final decision on interventions, and is seldom united on decisions to intervene. For example, the AU Peace and Security Council's recommended intervention into Burundi was rejected by the Assembly in January 2016. Second, the AU has yet to establish the 25,000-strong African Standby Force (ASF), a continental contingent that is expected to be deployed whenever Article 4(h) has been triggered. Third, other institutions such as the AU Commission, the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), and the African Court of Justice (ACJ) have not been active in the continental security architecture, and thus have little or no meaningful supranational powers. Fourth, the AU governance architecture has been unable to address fundamental rights violations and failed to build an effective early warning system.

Since the end of the Cold War, UN peace support operations now include other mandates – beyond military expertise – such as peacebuilding involving reintegrating combatants, strengthening the rule of law, improving respect for human rights, strengthening democratic institutions, and promoting justice and reconciliation. Civilian police in peacekeeping missions now perform non-military protection tasks that militaries are often not trained to undertake. In this regard, the UN civilian police authorised strength for peacekeeping operations grew from 1,677 in January 1994 to 7,545 in August 2023, demonstrating an increased demand for policing expertise in peace operations. In Africa, as of August 2023, there were 7,475 UN civilian police officers deployed to Abyei, the DRC, Mali, South Sudan, Western Sahara, and CAR.

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UNITED NATIONS CIVILIAN POLICE IN THE DRC IN JUNE 2020.

IMAGE CREDIT - [Wikimedia Commons](#)



5. A Life of Service: Experiences in Mediation, Humanitarian Action, and Diplomacy

Contemporary global security challenges mirror the Cold War era. In addition, social media has fuelled profound mistrust between the great powers and within Western societies, indicating a growing need for greater cooperation among domestic and international actors. The ongoing Ukraine and Gaza conflicts further demonstrate this deficit of trust and the lack of effective tools to undertake conflict prevention. However, some hope remains in the empowerment of women and youth.

6. Human Rights, Mass Atrocities, and Protecting Civilians in Africa

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) concept promoted by the UN since 2005 is guided by three key pillars: the responsibility of states to protect their populations; the responsibility of international actors to encourage and support states in their protection responsibilities; and the responsibility of the international community to protect, if necessary, through collective action. R2P aims to prevent mass atrocities such as war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. Many conflicts in Africa can be linked to increased fatalities in one-sided violence related to the direct and deliberate killings of civilians. These, however, represent a failure of R2P principles.

The need for proper understanding and implementation of R2P is increasingly apparent in Africa, since conflicts have become more durable and complex. This has created increased humanitarian crises in Sudan, South Sudan, CAR, Chad, the DRC, Somalia, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria. There are also current and looming climatic crises including droughts, floods, and cyclones. In 2000, international humanitarian funding was \$2 billion, increasing to \$25.21 billion in 2023, which is half of the \$54.8 billion required. According to the UN, a total of 81 million people required humanitarian assistance in 2014, a number that had increased to 363.2 million in 2023. Eastern and Southern Africa have the largest number of people in need at 76.8 million.

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ANTI-UN PROTESTS IN GOMA, EASTERN DRC, IN JULY 2022.

IMAGE CREDIT - [Wikimedia Commons](#)



7. Promoting Climate Justice, and Decolonizing Liberal Peace and Security in Africa

Africa accounts for a low share of global greenhouse gas emissions at three per cent, with nearly 80 per cent of historical cumulative fossil and Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) CO₂ fumes emitted by the Group of 20 (G20) countries, mainly China, the US, and the European Union (EU). This demonstrates that African countries are disproportionately affected by climate change, resulting in a moral dilemma that climate justice seeks

to address. According to the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), loss and damage costs from climate change are expected to reach between \$290 billion and \$440 billion annually on the continent between 2020 and 2030. Adaptation costs, according to the African Development Bank (AfDB), are estimated at \$20 billion to \$30 billion annually. Climate adaptation – seeking to reduce vulnerability to climate change – is therefore not only cost-effective, but also people-centred.

In its peacebuilding efforts in Africa, the UN often prioritises international interventions and top-down approaches over locally-owned initiatives. These peacebuilding efforts have, however, failed to provide sustainable peace on the continent, with conflicts recurring after five years or less. Peace efforts in South Sudan and Somalia are examples of such “liberal peacebuilding”. The top-down approaches in both states focused on building state institutions, promoting security sector reform, and developing liberal market ideologies. Yet, both states remain active conflict zones. “Decolonial peacebuilding”, in contrast, has resulted in some success in Somaliland where indigenous approaches have achieved some stability and development.

In 2022, the UN recorded grave violations affecting 18,890 children in armed conflicts globally. These violations involved killing, maiming, recruitment, and abduction of children. Seven African states – CAR, the DRC, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan – were among the worst cases.

A CHILD IN A REBEL CAMP IN NORTH-EASTERN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC IN JUNE 2007.

IMAGE CREDIT - [Wikimedia Commons](#)



8. Mediation Lessons, and Addressing the Scourge of Children and Armed Conflict in Africa

Former United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in his 1992 *An Agenda for Peace*, defined mediation as part of peacemaking efforts which involve actions to bring hostile parties to agreement through effective peacebuilding measures. The success or failure of mediation is thus based on three key factors: political will on the part of the conflicting parties (such as the April 2011 attempted and failed AU mediation in Libya); leverage by the mediator (such as the UN mediation efforts in Western Sahara in which a lack of leverage has so far failed to bring Morocco to the negotiation table); and third, a commitment by external actors (such as the current efforts of Saudi Arabia, the US, and other international actors in Sudan). Despite a growing mediation gap, most successful mediation in Africa has been led by Africans. Only five of 15 successful conflict mediations – defined in terms of peace agreements reached – in Africa between 1989 and 2018, were led by non-Africans.

The scourge of children in armed conflict across the continent has also attracted various international mitigation efforts. These initiatives have, however, failed to have a substantial impact on children in wars. In 2022, the UN recorded grave violations affecting 18,890 children in armed conflicts globally. These violations involved killing, maiming, recruitment, and abduction of children. Seven African states – CAR, the DRC, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan – were among the worst cases. The continent currently accounts for 40 per cent of the world's 250,000 child soldiers.

9. Tackling Militant Groups

Addressing the root causes of jihadism in Africa requires understanding the views of jihadists such as Boko Haram in Nigeria who often cite anger at local, national, and global policies and power structures. Structural factors such as poverty, underdevelopment, and marginalisation are important root causes of jihadism in Africa. This situation is exacerbated by the limited capacity of national security forces, coupled with the excessive use of force by securocrats which has made it easier for jihadist networks to infiltrate local and vulnerable conflict-affected communities by spreading ideological appeal and strategic manipulation among marginalised populations.

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THIS FORMER POLICE STATION IN BAMA, BORNO STATE, NIGERIA, WAS COMPLETELY DESTROYED BY BOKO HARAM INSURGENTS IN 2019.

IMAGE CREDIT - [Wikimedia Commons](#)



Policy Recommendations

Ten substantial policy recommendations emerged from the October/November 2023 Uppsala seminar:

1. First, there is an urgent need to build bridges between the three key pillars of the international system – security, development, and human rights – especially since only 12 per cent of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been achieved at its halfway point in 2023.
2. Second, in order to mitigate the humanitarian crises in Africa, all international aid agencies, including the UN, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and donors must commit to working according to three fundamental principles: national systems should be reinforced and not replaced; crises should be anticipated and planned for instead of improvising in often chaotic conditions; and there must be effective cooperation between humanitarian workers and development actors.
3. Third, research indicates that half of conflict cases tend to relapse into war within five years due to inadequate peacebuilding. This demonstrates the failure of the poorly funded UN Peacebuilding Commission. There is therefore an urgent need for a better-resourced UN Peacebuilding Commission that can work closely with the Security Council.
4. Fourth, the challenges facing the AU's supranational right to intervene can be addressed by reassessing the decision-making process for activating its Article 4(h). Potentially effective approaches would include decisions by AU leaders being subject to a two-thirds majority rather than taken by consensus, with the AU Peace and Security Council being granted the authority to make the final decision on future interventions.

5. Fifth, there is an urgent need to operationalise an effective 25,000-strong African Standby Force, supported by UN funding and logistics, in order to address the challenges of deploying financially and logistically deficient African peacekeepers.
6. Sixth, consistent with the July 2023 *A New Agenda for Peace* of UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, there is an urgent need for regional peace enforcers to be supported through UN-assessed funding. This will ensure that deployed peacekeepers are able to sustain themselves in the field.
7. Seventh, UN troop-contributing countries must ensure that deployments are aimed specifically at restoring peace to conflict zones and protecting civilians in need, rather than pursuing more parochial interests. Peacekeepers must thus be willing to take part in risky operations in Africa.
8. Eighth, in order to address the inherently hierarchical decision-making process of the UN Security Council, an institutional mechanism to document, track, support, and improve E10 membership should be created to serve as a secretariat for non-permanent members of the Council. Lessons learned can thus be more efficiently shared with present and future E10 members.
9. Ninth, the current UN Security Council is a relic of the 1945 world and therefore not fit-for-purpose in the twenty-first century. As such, permanent membership of the Council should be expanded to include regional powers such as Nigeria, South Africa, Brazil, and India.
10. Finally, predominant approaches to mitigating the contemporary climate crises are those which sustain and extend existing political and economic structures. There is therefore an urgent need to promote climate justice in the crafting of climate policies using decolonial methods to address climate change-related issues. Indigenous mechanisms for peacebuilding and justice should thus be restored and implemented with the active participation of local communities.

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UGANDAN SOLDIERS AT AN EASTERN AFRICAN STANDBY FORCE FIELD TRAINING EXERCISE IN DJIBOUTI IN NOVEMBER 2009.

IMAGE CREDIT - [Wikimedia Commons](#)



This project is funded by



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Sustainable Development
(ID: 2021-02682_3)