Politics of Intervention within the African Peace and Security Architecture: The Fluid Roles between the African Union and Sub-Regional Organizations

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Abstract

The most competitive and uncertain aspects of African integration is the specific roles and responsibilities of the African Union (AU) and sub-regional bodies that are operating within the African Peace and security Architecture (APSA). This motivated recent attempts to develop a division of labor between the AU and subregions in the context of the ongoing AU reform. Hence, this article examines the politics of regional responses to conflicts based on interviews with officials at the AU and subregional organizations. The article finds that the responsibility for intervention within APSA is determined by a fluid concept of subsidiarity and comparative advantage that defies attempts at having clear-cut divisions of labor at least at this stage in APSA's development. Roles within APSA are determined by multi-factors such as capabilities of affected sub-regions, interests of member states and cross-regional dimensions of conflicts. While the AU has comparative advantage to intervene in context with weak subregional organizations, stronger subregional bodies increasingly rely on their capacities to lead peace initiatives. Furthermore, member states facing cross-border crises are increasingly circumventing bureaucracies and indecision of multiple sub-regions and the AU by initiating ad hoc coalitions-of-affected states to address cross-regional conflicts. Although clear-cut roles within APSA are untenable, the AU and subregions ought to develop a sequential framework for their working modalities and enhance their coordination mechanisms to reduce tensions and attain efficiency.

Introduction

In the past five years, the direct intervention of the African Union (AU) in crisis situations has declined significantly compared to its roles in the first decade of its establishment. When it was formed in 2001, the AU initiated several peace initiatives in member states including Burundi, Comoro Islands, Sudan and Somalia between 2003 and 2007. In 2013 and 2014, the AU also took over missions initiated by sub-regional organizations in Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR). These interventions alongside the continental bodies central role in setting the norms of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) highlighted the AU's leadership role in Africa's peace and security landscape.

However, the recent decline in AU's role is not due to the reduction of conflicts in Africa. Rather, an emerging trend shows that sub-regional organizations and coalitions are increasingly circumventing the bureaucracies at the continental level by relying on their capacities to lead peace initiatives in their respective regions. This is evident in the leading roles of sub-regions in security cases in the Lake Chad Basin, the Sahel, the situations in South Sudan, the Gambia, Lesotho and Guinea Bissau. As such, the AU, which exhibited robust agency in the first decade of its establishment, seems to be shifting towards norm-setting while sub-regional arrangements spearhead the interventions in their regions (PSC Report 2017).

Undoubtedly, the role of sub-regional organizations in resolving subregional threats is an ideal envisaged within the pan-African ideals of subsidiarity in the context of the African Economic Community (AEC), Constitutive Act of the AU and the APSA. However, the sticking point is the limited clarity on what subsidiarity means within the existing legal documents which places greater emphasis on collaboration between the APSA institutions (AU & RECs/RMs MoU 2008). Additionally, the MoU between the AU and sub-regional organizations does not provide guidance on which conflict situations or stages will be addressed either by the AU or the subregions. Hence, in crises situations, the AU and RECs/RMs lay similar claims to primary roles in peace processes (AU PSD, 2010). The situation is compounded by the blurred lines in the primacy of the AU and concerns around what role the continental role should play in African security initiatives going forward. This is further complicated by the lack of consistency among heads of state who envision a stronger AU that leads continental initiatives. But when presented with practical issues, African states take pragmatic stance often favoring solutions at the sub-regional level – and sometimes forming *ad hoc* arrangements – where their interest could be better considered than at the continental level where multiple bureaucracies and interests are at play.

While interventions by sub-regions is key in line with the principle of subsidiarity, there is no clear policy direction on how to address situations where sub-regions face bottlenecks. There are also limited guidance on how to provide checks and balances, especially when sub-regional roles become an impediment to peace (Franke, 2006). The overlapping roles between the AU and sub-regions have not only engendered competition, it has also fostered duplicity and half-hearted measures by African institutions working within the APSA framework (Momodu 2016).

Indeed, African policy makers have observed that a division of labour between the AU and regional economic communities (RECs) is integral not only in terms of managing expectations about the AU but also in terms of coordinating Africa's response to avoid duplicity and wastage of resources (Kagame 2017). This partly led to the AU reform process, which was initiated in January 2017 to, among other goals, ensure a 'a clear division of labour and effective collaboration among the AU, the RECs, the Regional Mechanisms (RMs), the Member States, and other continental institutions, in line with the principle of subsidiarity' (AU Assembly 2017).

The introduction of a Mid-Year Coordination Meeting between the AU and RECs in replacement of the second AU assembly meeting, is a landmark step in terms of harmonizing AU relations with RECs. A declaration adopted during the first mid-year coordination meeting between the AU and RECs/RMs, requires the parties to 'rapidly establish practical modalities to facilitate timely and coordinated responses to continental crises' and to rapidly develop a plan of action on an effective division of labor (AU-RECs/RMs 2019). While current efforts are on the way to develop a division of labor, the proposed divisions are still at a broader level

while the specific aspect of peace and security has not been elaborated due to its highly political and contentious nature.

Hence, this research draws from primary documents and interviews with key decision and policy makers to explore the political dynamics of intervention within APSA. Some studies have explored the relationships between one specific subregion and the AU in a crises situation (Franke 2006; Striebinger 2016). However, these studies have not examined the continent-wide dynamic relations between the AU and sub-regions and how it relates to the ongoing effort to delimit the roles and responsibilities within APSA. The report sets out by exploring the dynamic politics of intervention between the AU and sub-regions to provide clearer insight on the status quo. It explores the fluid application of the principle of subsidiarity and comparative advantage by APSA institutions.

The article uses a mix of desktop and field research to conduct the study. The conducted primary interviews with twenty (20) key decision and policy makers in four (4) field locations including the AU, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) which have been playing significant roles in African peace and security. The study was further enriched by the author's extensive experience as a researcher and practitioner with key Think Tanks and organizations working within the APSA processes. The first section sets out with a theoretical overview of the constructivist framework of APSA interventions. This is followed by an overview of the current responsibilities of interventions in crises situations. The subsequent sections examine the complex drivers of intervention by African institutions.

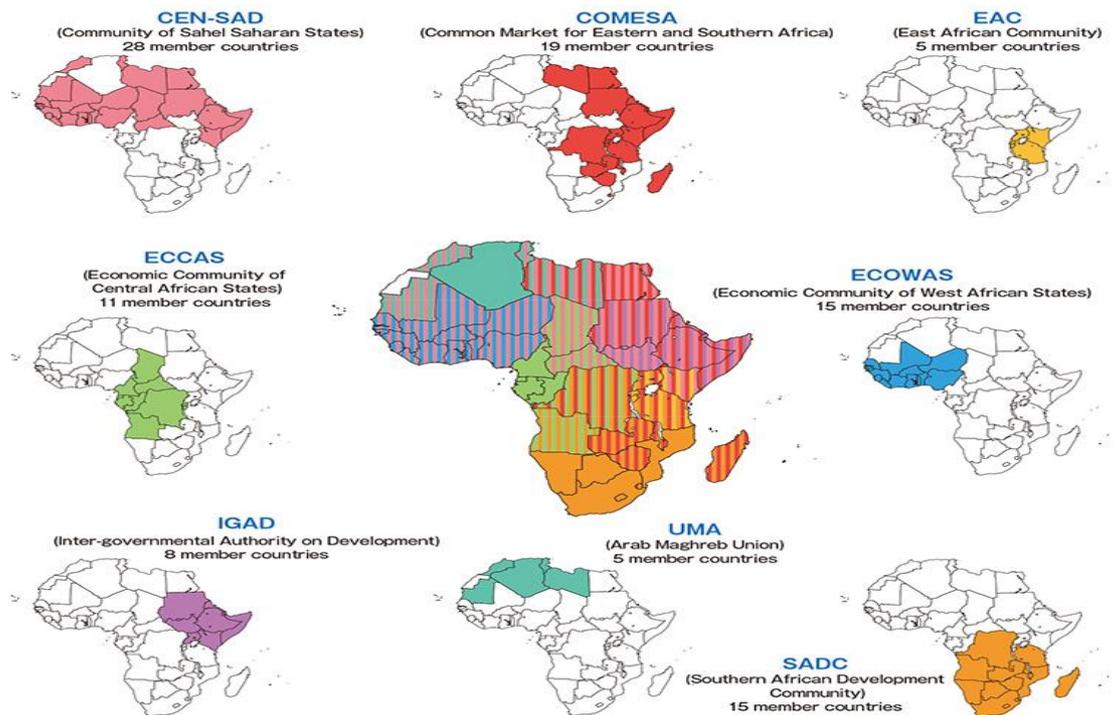**A Constructivist Framework of APSA**

APSA is composed of various independent African institutions with Pan-African orientation but at different capacity levels and sometimes with overlapping mandates and interests. Article 16 of the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the AU (PSC Protocol) affirms that mechanisms of subregional organizations are part of the APSA which is managed by the AU. The AU recognizes eight (8) sub-regional organizations including

> *ECOWAS, SADC, IGAD, the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU); the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA); the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD); the East African Community (EAC); and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).*

An overview of RECs in Africa (Afriwonk 2018)

Regional Economic Communities (RECs)

Africa is moving toward regional integration. There are eight Regional Economic Communities approved by the African Union (AU)

CEN-SAD
(Community of Sahel Saharan States)
28 member countries

COMESA
(Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa)
19 member countries

EAC
(East African Community)
5 member countries

ECCAS
(Economic Community of Central African States)
11 member countries

ECOWAS
(Economic Community of West African States)
15 member countries

IGAD
(Inter-governmental Authority on Development)
8 member countries

UMA
(Arab Maghreb Union)
5 member countries

SADC
(Southern African Development Community)
15 member countries

Article 3(l) of the Constitutive Act also recognizes other sub-regional mechanisms at an informal level by noting the need to 'coordinate and harmonize the policies between the existing and *future* RECs for the gradual attainment of the objectives of the Union'. Other sub-regional mechanisms include the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), G5 Sahel, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), amongst others. The AU PSC serves as the primary referent body for the 'collective security and early-warning arrangement to facilitate timely and efficient response to conflict and crisis situations in Africa' (AU PSC Protocol 2002: art. 2).

The constructivist framework provides clearer insights on the ideals that shape the convergence and divergence within APSA. Constructivism shows that prevailing ideas play the most important roles in shaping institutional identities and practices. Legro (2005: 6) highlights that 'ideas are not so much mental as symbolic and organizational; they are embedded not only in human brains but also in the "collective memories," government procedures, educational systems, and the rhetoric of statecraft.' As such, the international system is crafted by the intersubjective ideas that are shared among people, states and institutions, and then expressed as practices and identities (Legro 2005). Depending on the ideas that emanate from relationships, states could either compete or cooperate with each other others. Hence, constructivism provides insights on the ideals envisioned in Africa's regional integration agenda and how the AU and sub-regions converge and diverge on some ideals.

Indeed, the close relationship between the AU and subregions is born out of the prevailing idea of Pan-Africanism[1] including its component of regional integration. The contemporary framework of integration is that of gradual approach prior to a continent-wide political and economic unification of the continent (Murithi, 2008). Since the early 1970s when discussions about the need for sub-regional organizations ensued until 1980 when the Lagos Plan of Action

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[1] Pan-Africanist movement emerged in the 1990s to promote the dignity and freedom of Africans who were burdened by racial and colonial oppression (DeSaulnier, Haney and Knapp 2008).

was adopted, the establishment and strengthening of sub-regional organizations was encouraged as the pathway to gradual integration on the continent. In 1991, African leaders signed the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community (AEC) also known as the Abuja Treaty in 1991 which requires African states to gradually coordinate and harmonize their activities for the eventual establishment of the AEC in the year 2000. When the AU was established in 2001, a gradual integration remained the preferred integration model as opposed to the outright unification of the continent.

The interconnections of sub-regional organizations to the AU is reflective of the Africa-wide grand alliance for peace and security through complementary use of interrelated mechanisms at the continental, regional and national levels. As will be highlighted in subsequent sections, the Pan-African ideals of unity remains the catalyst for cooperation among the APSA institutions but the limited guidance on roles creates divergences on the specific responsibilities of the AU and subregions which have overlapping mandates.

Pan-African Cooperation Framework between the AU and Subregions

Some analysts observe that the legal documents of sub-regions are independent and do not subscribe to an AU oversight. Indeed, RECs have played significant role in addressing security challenges in their regions even before the AU was formed in 2001 to proactively address the continent's challenges. Notably, ECOWAS, SADC and IGAD have been prominent in peace initiatives in their respective regions.[2] Over the years, they have developed strong and viable mechanisms to respond to conflict even while the broader AU mechanisms are still being developed. In an online interview, Dr Cedric De Coning observes that:

> many if not most of the RECs in Central Africa, West Africa and southern Africa predates the AU and exists legally in their own right. So, it's not that we have a pre-existing legal hierarchy where RECs are subservience structure underneath the AU. They exist as equals in terms of having legal independence having being created by their members. Additionally, RECs have also shown significant experience in addressing conflicts before the AU was formed in 2001 (De Coning 2020: Online Interview).

While this perspective highlights the independent nature of sub-regions, the constructivist ideals of Pan-Africanism have long formalized the primacy of the AU both at the continental and subregional levels. At the continental level, the AU is expected to have primacy on the continent as highlighted by key African policy documents.

Table 1: Key Treaties and Policies guiding relationship within APSA

Treaty and Protocol	Key Objectives
Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community	• Article 6 outlines that the objective of the first stage of the AEC is 'to strengthen existing RECs and establishing new economic communities in regions where they do not exist'.

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[2] This includes ECOWAS intervention in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s as well as SADC's regular intervention in Lesotho. IGAD continues to play a key role in addressing the security threats in Somalia and South Sudan.

Constitutive Act of 2002	• The AU is expected to coordinate and harmonize the policies between the existing and future RECs for the gradual attainment of the objectives of the Union
Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the AU (PSC Protocol)	• Article 16 of the PSC protocol affirms that 'the Regional Mechanisms are part of the overall security architecture of the Union, which has the primary responsibility for promoting peace, security and stability in Africa.' • The members of subregional organisations are represented in the AU PSC's 15 member states who represent the 5 regions of Africa.
Protocol on Relations between the AU (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) of 2008	• The objective of the protocol is 'to promote cooperation between RECs and the AU 'through co-ordination and harmonization of their policies, measures, programmes and activities in all fields and sectors' • Article 5 of the Protocol requires members 'to review their treaties to strengthen their organic link with the AU'
Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Area of Peace and Security between the AU, the Regional Economic Communities and the Coordinating Mechanisms of the Regional Standby Brigades of Eastern Africa and Northern Africa of 2008. (AU & RECs/RMs MoU)	• The objective of the MoU is to promote closer co-operation, partnership, exchange of information, harmonization and coordination between RECs and the AU specifically on peace and security issues. • Article 4.4 highlights 'the adherence of subsidiarity, complementarity and comparative advantage, in order to optimize the partnership between the Union, the RECs and the Coordinating Mechanisms in the promotion and maintenance of peace, security and stability'.

The table above shows how sub-regional organizations are conceived as building blocs of the AU. Notably, the AU & RECs Protocol (2008) requires RECs to review their treaties to strengthen their organic link with the AU in line with Article 5. Article 5(b) of the Protocol also charges RECs to align 'their programmes, policies, and strategies with those of the AU' (AU-RECs Protocol, 2008). The AU further has the responsibility to monitor the activities of RECs and apply relevant sanctions on RECs whose policies and measures are incompatible with the objectives of the AEC Treaty. Likewise, the AU & RECs/RMs MoU of the same year 2008 sets out by outlining that the agreement is guided by the 'recognition of, and respect for, the primary responsibility of the Union in the maintenance and promotion of peace, security and stability in Africa, in accordance with Article 16 of the PSC Protocol'. These entails that RECs/RMs are accountable to the AU in peace and security initiatives parallel to how the AU is accountable to the UN which has the primary responsibility for international peace and security in line with Article 53 of the UN Charter.

At the sub-regional level, most of the RECs were established in line with OAU deliberations in the 1970s to the 1980s leading to the adoption of the AEC Treaty in 1991 (AEC Treaty 1991). With the exception of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), all the recognized RECs made references to the continental organization and highlight that they are inspired specifically by the African integration agenda.

Box 1: Highlights of Sub-regional Treaties Recognizing the Primacy of the AU (Author)	
ECOWAS	The preamble of the first ECOWAS Treaty (1975): maintains that 'efforts at sub-regional co-operation should not conflict with or hamper similar efforts being made to foster wider co-operation in Africa'. The preamble of the Revised Treaty of 24 July 1993 further recognized that the ECOWAS integration agenda is in line with the continent-wide integration commitment.
IGAD	The Agreement establishing IGAD (1996) also affirmed continental commitments by tying its objectives to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community'.
EAC	The treaty further commits its member states to the 'desire for a wider unity of Africa and regard the Community as a step towards the achievement of the objectives of the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community.'
SADC	The SADC Treaty (1992) took into account the 'Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Action of Lagos of April 1980, and the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community signed at Abuja, on the 3rd of June 1991'.
COMESA	The COMESA Treaty (1994) was 'Inspired by the objectives of the Treaty for the Establishment of the African Economic Community'.
ECCAS	The ECCAS also recognizes the objectives of the OAU and 'The Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos (April 1980), in particular the measures relating to the economic, social and cultural development of Africa and inter alia those relating to the establishment of sub-regional structures with a view to the gradual and progressive establishment of an African common market as a prelude to an African economic community'.
	ECOWAS, SADC, IGAD, EAC, ECCAS, COMESA, CEN-SAD all have clauses on depositing and registering the treaty with the OAU/AU and the UN.

Although RECs emerged primarily to promote socio-economic cooperation and integration, they have also expanded their mandate to include political integration in view of compelling cases of political instability. In line with political integration, the peace and security objective of most RECs was born out of the recognition that economic growth and development are impossible without stability and peace. At present, all the RECs and some regional mechanisms such as the LCBC, G5 Sahel and ICGLR have peace and security objectives as highlighted in the table below.

For instance, the earliest RECs on the continent ECOWAS (founded in 1975) and ECCAS (founded in 1983) do not make reference to peace and security objectives in their initial treaties. As an afterthought, ECOWAS adopted a Protocol on Non-Aggression in 1978 due to the regional instability in the region. ECOWAS went further to adopt a Protocol on Mutual Assistance Defense in 1981 leading to the creation of the Defense Committee and Council as well as the Allied Armed Force of the Community. In the early 1990s, ECOWAS members

took the opportunity to include peace and security in the revised treaty of 1993 particularly in Article 4. The ECCAS Treaty of 1983 as well does not mention peace and security. Sixteen (16) years later in 1999, ECCAS adopted the Protocol of Peace and Security in February 1999, to deal with the conflicts and political instability in the region.

Table 2: Overview of the RECs recognized by the AU and their Peace and Security instruments (Author)

Subregional Organisation	Founded	Member states	Treaties and Protocols on Peace and Security
AMU	17-Feb-89	5 Member States: Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia.	• Treaty Establishing the Arab Maghreb Union
CEN-SAD	4-Feb-98	29 Members: Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, the Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, the Sudan, Togo and Tunisia.	• Treaty Establishing CEN-SAD • CEN-SAD Security Charter (2000) • The Niamey Declaration of 2003 • Protocol on Prevention Mechanism, Management and Resolution of Conflicts • 2009 Sharm-el-Sheikh Declaration on anti-terrorism and security
COMESA	8-Dec-93	19 Members: Burundi, Comoros, Congo, Dem Rep., Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.	• Treaty Establishing COMESA
EAC	30-Nov-99	6 Members: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda and United Republic of Tanzania.	• Treaty Establishing EAC • Peace and Security Strategy of 2006 • Protocol on Peace and Security of 2012
ECCAS	18-Oct-83	10 Members: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Republic of the Congo, São Tomé and Príncipe	• Treaty of ECCAS • Protocol on Security Council in Central Africa (COPAX) of 2004 • Protocol Relating to the Strategy to Secure ECCAS' Gulf of Guinea in October, 2009 • Declaration of the Heads of State and Government on Maritime Safety and Security in 2013

ECOWAS	28-May-75	15 members: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo	• Revised Treaty of ECOWAS in 1993 • Protocol on Non-Aggression in 1978 • Protocol on Mutual Assistance Defense in 1981 • The Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace Keeping and Security of 1999 • Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance in 2001 • The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF, 2008)
IGAD	1/1/1986 (re-launched in 1996)	8 Members: Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, the Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda.	• Agreement Establishing IGAD • Protocol on Democracy, Governance and Election • IGAD Pace and Security Strategy, (2016-2020) • Protocol establishing the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) 2002 • Guidelines for Election Observers and IGAD Code of Conduct for Election Observers 2011 • IGAD Draft Protocol on Governance, Democracy and Elections, 2014
SADC	17-Aug-92	16 Members: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.	• SADC Declaration and Treaty of 1992 • Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation in 2001 • Mutual Defence Pact that in 2003 • SADC 2015 Regional Counterterrorism Strategy

In matters of peace and security, the responsibilities of African institutions were articulated in the AU & RECs/RMs MoU of 2008. While highlighting the primary responsibility of the AU, Article 20 of the MoU states that RECs should:

> anticipate and prevent conflicts within and among their members states and to undertake peace-making and peacebuilding efforts including through the deployment of peace support missions.

When RECs intervene, they are expected to keep the AU fully informed on a regular basis and ensure that their activities are in line with the objectives of the AU PSC Protocol. While explaining the central role of the AU, a respondent from the AU maintains that 'Article 16 of the PSC protocol is the bedrock of the APSA mandate. It situates the AU as having primacy over peace and security situations in Africa. The 2008 MoU clearly defines the roles of the AU and sub-regions, but the MoU is also read in accordance with the Article 16. Regions take the lead in responding but guided by the AU, the protocol is clear on this. It is important to note that RECs are part of the APSA that is managed by the AU. Hence, RECs may not be acting on their own.'

However, the guiding documents of APSA including the AU & RECs/RMs MoU are not clear on specific roles and responsibilities of the AU and subregions. While subsidiarity is mentioned once in the MoU, the consistent wordings across the MoU include 'work together', 'cooperate', 'combine their efforts', 'collaborate' amongst other similar cooperation synonyms. Article 7.4 of the AU & RECs/RMs MoU (2008) surmises the collaborative vision of APSA by indicating that

> where conflicts have occurred, the parties shall cooperate in peace-making and peace-building activities to resolve these conflicts and prevent their recurrence, including through good offices, mediation, conciliation, enquiry and deployment of peace support missions as provided for in the PSC Protocol and other relevant regional instruments.'

The predominance of the joint cooperation wordings blurs the lines on who should directly intervene when crises erupts. Indeed, this leaves the MoU open to interpretation (Striebinger, 2016; Momodou 2016). Most respondents agree that the limited clarity about what subsidiarity and comparative advantage means in practice is the roots of competition and duplicity within APSA. The MoU does not stipulate that the AU or a particular REC should play initial role of addressing a conflict before escalating it to the AU level. Linda Darkwa, the Coordinator of the Training for Peace (TfP) Programme notes that:

> What we have not quite articulated well is the whole concept of subsidiarity and what it means in practice. Perhaps what we need to do is to actually do a mapping of what subsidiarity means in practice and use that to inform whatever we want to do (Darkwa 2020: Online Interview).

Put differently, De Coning maintains that

> The 2008 MoU is very broad and there's no clear agreement on how a division of labor works. It is not clear that RECs will be the first responders and that only if they are not able to deal with a particular situation before it will be the responsibility of the AU. So in terms of peace operations, clarity of roles is much needed especially in terms of what subsidiarity means.

Due to the limited clarity on roles, the AU and RECs may simultaneously be involved in the conflict prevention, management and resolution of crises from the initial stages. While a joint intervention is very progressive, the modus operandi in terms of responding jointly to emerging and changing dynamics, especially at the initial stages, is unclear. But why would institutions show eagerness to engage in intervention which require huge responsibility on the part of the intervener?

Apart from the need to ensure African solutions to the impediments to peace and development on the continent, the keenness to intervene is driven by the concern that inaction by either the AU or sub-regional organizations is costly. A pattern of unwillingness to intervene in crises situations could create impression that the relevant organization is redundant and inefficient. For the AU and sub-regional organizations, the consequence is the potential of loss of local and international support including loss of credibility and capacity to mobilize external resources which they rely on for their day-to-day operation. Hence, the eagerness to be relevant when conflict erupts drives duplicity and sometimes friction as the actors intend to lead.

Nevertheless, there are indeed no easy answers on specific roles and responsibilities within APSA because interventions are determined by a myriad of factors including the capacities of RECs, the interests of member states, comparative advantage and gaps in coordination within APSA. The following section will interrogate these drivers of intervention within APSA.

The Agency of APSA Institutions: Who is Responsible for What?

Since its establishment in 2001, the AU played leading roles in most of the large-scale conflicts thereby setting some precedent for its robust role in African security landscape. It is worth emphasizing that the AU was formed to replace the OAU which lacked relevant normative frameworks and mechanisms to respond to conflict situations such as the conflicts in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, Sierra Leone and Sudan in the 1990s. The AU was thus established to usher a new era of non-indifference to insecurities in member states in line with Article 4h-J of the AU Constitutive Act. Soon after its establishment, the AU deployed stabilization missions in various African countries including Burundi, Sudan, Comoros, Somalia and subsequently subsumed the sub-regional missions in Mali and CAR as indicated by the table below.

Table 3: AU's Interventions 2003-2020 (Author)

Region	Location	Mission and Acronym	Period
Eastern Africa	**Burundi**	AU Mission in Burundi (AMIB)	2003 – 2004
		Special Task Force Burundi	2006 – 2009
	Comoros	AU Military Observer Mission in the Comoros MIOC	2004
		AU Mission for Support to the Elections in the Comoros (AMISEC)	2006
		AU Electoral and Security Assistance Mission to the Comoros (MAES)	2007 – 2008
		Democracy in Comoros	2008
	Sudan (Darfur)	AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS)	2004 – 2007
		UN-AU Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID)	2008 – present
	Somalia	AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)	2007– present
West Africa	**Mali**	African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA)	2012-2013
Central Africa	**Central African Republic**	African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA)	2013- 2014

From the table above, the AU deployed missions just few years after its establishment to Burundi (from 2003 to 2004); Comoro Islands (in 2004, 2006 and 2007 to 2008); Sudan (2004 to 2007 and within UNAMID from 2008 to present); Somalia (from 2007 to present), Mali (2012 to 2013) and CAR (from 2013 to 2014). These interventions highlight the AU's

willingness to assert its role as a continental leader in maintaining peace and security. While the sub-regions were involved, their actions were largely led and coordinated by the AU.

However, the table below provides a new trend within APSA – a trend which shows that sub-regions are increasingly playing lead roles in addressing security situations while the AU plays supporting roles. In February 2020, the AU PSC submitted its customary report on the state of peace and security to the AU Assembly (AU PSC Report 2020). The report gave an account of 18 crises situations that are of critical interest to APSA. The conflicts range from high level political instability to emerging and prolonged insecurities on the continent. The role of APSA actors was primarily in the areas of mediation and peace operations as shown by the table below.

Table 4: Overview of Contemporary Conflicts in Africa and Responses of APSA (Author)

	Crises cases	Memberships	Lead mediator	Lead in peace operations
East Africa	South Sudan	IGAD/EAC	IGAD	UN: UNMISS
	Sudan	IGAD	AU/IGAD	UN/AU: UNAMID
	Somalia	IGAD/COMESA/ CEN-SAD	IGAD	AU: AMISOM
	Madagascar	SADC/COMESA	AU/SADC	Not applicable
	Burundi	EAC/ECCAS/CO MESA	EAC	Not applicable
Central Africa	DRC	SADC/ECCAS/C OMESA	SADC/AU (Others: ICGLR)	UN: MONUSCO SADC Force Intervention Brigade (FIB)
	CAR	ECCAS/CEN-SAD	AU/ECCAS	UN: MINUSCA
	Cameroon	ECCAS	Not Applicable	Not applicable
	Comoros	OIC/IOC/COMES A/CEN-SAD	Multiple actors (AU)	Not applicable
Southern Africa	Mozambique	SADC	Not Applicable	SADC
	Lesotho	SADC	SADC	SADC
West Africa and Sahel	Guinea Bissau	ECOWAS/CEN-SAD/	ECOWAS	ECOWAS: ECOMIB
	The Gambia	ECOWAS/CEN-SAD/	ECOWAS	ECOWAS
	Mali	ECOWAS/CEN-SAD/	ECOWAS	UN: MINUSMA
	Sahel (Terrorism & Transnational crime)	ECOWAS/CEN-SAD/	Members of G5 Sahel	G5 Sahel Joint task force (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger)

Lake Chad Basin	Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger (Boko Haram)	LCBC/ECOWAS/ ECCAS/CEN-SAD	Not Applicable	MNJTF (Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger) and Benin
North Africa	Libya	AMU	UN	Not applicable
	Morocco/Western Sahara	AMU	UN	MINURSO

In terms of mediation, sub-regions hold lead roles in seven (7) conflict situations out of the 18 conflict scenarios including: South Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, Lesotho, Guinea Bissau, The Gambia and Mali. On the other hand, the AU plays lead roles in two (2) political mediation in Madagascar and the Comoros while jointly cooperating with IGAD, SADC and ECCAS in three (3) crises situations including Sudan, DRC and CAR respectively. The UN takes lead roles in two (2) mediatory situations including Libya and Western Sahara while four (4) situations do not involve mediatory efforts by the three main stakeholders.

In terms of peace support operations, subregions have peace missions in six (6) conflict situations out of the 16 situations including: Lesotho, Guinea Bissau, The Gambia, Mozambique, Sahel and Lake Chad Basin. The AU has its only peace mission in Somalia and cooperates with the UN in one (1) situation in Sudan. The UN undertakes peace missions in four (4) situations while the remaining four (4) situations do not involve peace missions.

The table above shows that subregions are increasingly taking lead roles in security situations on the continent while the AU's lead role is rescinding. This is unlike before when the continental body was present in most of the major conflict situations across the five regions of Africa. The status quo thereby raises questions about the future trajectories of APSA, particularly the role of the AU.

One approach to comprehending the rescinding role of the AU is that the continental body has set the relevant examples and introduced relevant mechanisms for sub-regional organizations to step up to the security situations in their specific regions. Indeed, the grand plan of the APSA – just like the AEC plan – is that sub-regional organizations are the building blocs and they are envisioned to address security threats at their level. Hence, the AU having played its part in setting examples for African intervention has over the years empowered sub-regions to handle security situations of their member states. Notwithstanding the ad hoc interventions of ECOWAS and the SADC in the 1990s, the AU formalized Africa's nonchalance posture to security threats across the continent. The AU has also outlined relevant norms and mechanisms required for maintaining peace and security such as the CEWS, ASF and Panel of the Wise which are being replicated across sub-regional organisations in Africa. As such, the AU's interventions and role in norm-setting in APSA has enabled RECs to have relevant mechanism including the standby capacity to respond to security issues.[3]

However, a closer analysis highlights the fluid political dynamics of interventions within APSA. Interventions within APSA is based on three (3) key determinants including the fluid application of subsidiarity within self-reliance RECs, the AU's comparative advantage in contexts with weaker RECs and the dynamism of multiple RECs.

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[3] A caveat to this however, is that AU norms for intervention have been heavily influenced by the experiences of strong RECs like ECOWAS and SADC in peace operations in the 1990s (Darkwa and Attuquayefio 2014).

Self-Reliance within Certain Sub-regions

Increasingly, some African states are finding it rather convenient to pursue solutions at the sub-regional level where their interest are better articulated than in the broader AU platform which has multiple players with different interests. While the principle of subsidiarity is key in the APSA framework, the self-reliance within certain RECs like ECOWAS and SADC is motivated by the limited confidence in AU leadership added to they fact that they do not necessarily need the AU for political influence and resources resources required to initiate and undertake peace initiatives (Khadiagala, 2018: 8). Notably, AU deliberations on peace and security rely largely on the inputs from actors in the subregion. Co-opting the AU could then lead to a slow process where distant members of other regions have to gradually learn about the conflict dynamics and the complexities of the sub-regional dynamics. For instance, the situation in Guinea Bissau is an issue closely understood and mediated by ECOWAS. Same as the SADC's role in Lesotho. The AU PSC meetings and decisions on these countries have largely been reliant on the briefings from members of these specific regions while other members mainly provide normative and process-based inputs. While the AU could provide some third eye perspective on crises situations, the comparative advantage of stronger RECs in crises situations often holder greater sway.

With the backing of Africa's superpowers like Nigeria and South Africa, some RECs like ECOWAS and SADC respectively could credibly impose effective economic and political leverage to get member states to adhere to peace. If the AU should seek economic sanctions, it will rely on the sub-regions' cooperation for its threats to be effective.[4] Additionally, these RECs could independently mobilize resources from external actors due to their credibility and effectiveness in peace missions over the years. Hence, in situations where a REC could intervene effectively, the role of the AU may be seen as an added coordination responsibility for RECs.

There has been a number of tensions between the AU and RECs during crises situations. For instance, the post-elections crisis in Côte d'Ivoire and the crisis in Mali show how ECOWAS sought paramount control of interventionist attempts without the coordination of the AU (ISS PSC Report 2014). While commenting on a question of competition between AU and RECs, a respondent from the ECOWAS Commission maintains that:

> There are certain principles that are important. For instance, when we talk about subsidiarity, comparative advantage and complementarity, ECOWAS is not a subsidiary or lower organization to the AU. ECOWAS is a partner to the AU. But there seems to be an impression that subregions are an appendix of the AU. ECOWAS has been addressing security issues long before the AU know it is happening. For instance, the issues in Mali and Guinea Bissau, the ECOWAS only wants the AU to mobilize support for ECOWAS. But the AU will end up adding its intervention area without supporting the ECOWAS to do so.

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[4] Furthermore, the comparative advantage of subregions is in the nature of their response to crises situations. Notably, the AU discussion on security situations is often at the level of the AU Chairperson and the PSC which holds meetings often at the ambassadorial level. However, at the subregional level, emerging peace and security interventions are often led by Heads of States while receiving support from the relevant technical committees. At the AU level however, getting respective Heads of State to action takes a longer process and involves significant coordination with subregions.

While commenting on the Mali crises in 2012, another respondent from ECOWAS narrates that

> What the AFISMA has shown us is that during the early phases, you see overlapping effort in terms of the AU and RECs mandate which is regrettable. You know that ECOWAS sent the first mission as MISMA which was formed following the coup and the issue of terrorism. The task of the AU was to support the intervention. But the AU was not seeing it in that way. What we saw is that while ECOWAS was in the field, AU was preparing to deploy AFISMA. When the AU came with the umbrella of the UN, we were not really happy with that and we developed some lessons learnt. The MoU gives us the possibility to intervene solely or in conjunction with the AU. When we prevent and manage peace, the AU is supposed to come at the level of peacebuilding.

The quest for autonomy in intervention is not specific to ECOWAS. While commenting on the question of specific roles, a respondent from the SADC explains that

> In line with the subsidiarity principle, RECs should implement their mandate independently. However, the AU can provide technical and financial support towards any matters which affect negatively the stability, security and development in the sub-region. The AU should not interfere in any peace and security matters in a sub-region unless requested to do so by a REC or if/when the situation endangers the lives of civilian population and the REC is unable to intervene.

However, a respondent from the AU holds an alternative view.

> in Mali and Guinea Bissau, ECOWAS wanted to be the sole intervener. The AU cannot relinquish its continental role and it is important to align efforts in line with normative frameworks. In the hierarchy of global power intervention, the UN has not left the AU to intervene alone. Why should the AU leave RECs to intervene alone? There is efficiency in joint and collective action. In fact, no international actor can do things alone. Even the UN which is in South Sudan was helped by the AU/IGAD with the protection force. Same for the SADC providing the Force Intervention Brigade in DRC where the UN is already deployed. When you decide to go alone, make sure you have all the resources to achieve all the peace goals.

Indeed, these tensions are subtle but they reflect the inherent struggle around the extent to which sub-regions should operate independently as well as the extent of the AU's supranational capacity in line with pan-African ideals. The tensions often arise in situations of coordination gaps. For instance, some authors have highlight the tensions arising from the contradictory measures adopted by the AU and ECOWAS in relations to the sanctions on Togo (Striebinger, 2016). When Togo's Gnassingbé Eyadéma died in February 2005, the military imposed his son Faure Gnassingbé as the President contrary to the constitution which requires the President of the National Assembly to replace the dead president. The AU and ECOWAS imposed sanctions on the new government. However, when Faure resigned due to the outcry, ECOWAS lifted its sanctions but the AU reintroduced additional sanctions on Togo highlighting the imperative for free and fair elections (Striebinger, 2016). However, given that the sub-regions are the ones to implement the decision, the AU eventually went in line with ECOWAS. Such discrepancies could have been avoided if there was adequate coordination.

Additionally, in the Gambia, the ECOWAS deployed its standby force to prevent Yahya Jammeh from serving beyond his mandate. The ECOWAS Mission in the Gambia (ECOMIG) ensured calm and paved way for the installation of the President Elect, Adama Barrow including the subsequent protection of his government and the introduction of security sector reform. ECOWAS deployed the mission prior to seeking authorization from the AU – a move which shows that sub-regions have capacities to undertake a mission with or without the AU and are willing to deploy rapidly. A different perspective however is that the situation is in line with international practice similar to when the AU request for UN authorization when it has already deployed a peace support operation. On the one hand, the AU's ASF strategy provided a framework for ECOWAS deployment. Sub-regional decision to deploy standby forces is also in tandem with article 20 of the AU-RECs/RMs MoU (2008) which requires sub-regions to deploy. The AU praised ECOWAS intervention as reflective of the ASF readiness to enforce peace and democracy.

Nevertheless, what is evident is that in situations where a strong REC exist, there tend to be lesser commitment to AU's leadership (Vines 2013: 101). A 2010 assessment of APSA also revealed that 'some RECs/RMs are of the view that, the AU Commission should not view itself as an implementing agency; it should rather play more of a coordination role' (AU PSD, 2010) but especially in norm setting while RECs do the actual interventions. There are not enough data to examine the entirety of AU PSC activities, but statistics in the report of the PSC on its activities between January 2019 and February 2020 shows that the PSC had about 30 thematic issues while also deliberating actively on about 10 country-specific cases that are being addressed separately and jointly with RECs (AU PSC Report 2020). Some see this as an increasing AU relevance in the area of norm-setting rather than direct intervention (PSC Report 2017).

Furthermore, the tensions around who intervenes directly is arguably driven by the quest to gain funds and resources from external donors as well as the need to bolters institutional capacity and experience in intervention situation (Franke 2006: 13). Although sub-regional organisations often seek authorization from the AU, it is arguable that the AU authorization is merely a technicality to successfully request and obtain external funding. Notably, RECs and Regional Mechanisms (RMs) requires AU endorsement to access funds from the European Union (EU)'s African Peace Facility (APF) (EU Commission 2017: 5). The APF, which is now subsumed under the European Peace Facility (EPF), was established in 2004 following the AU's request for support to African peace and security efforts during the AU Summit in July 2003 (AU Assembly 2003). The African peace efforts in Somalia, Sudan, Mali, Central African Republic (CAR), Gambia, South Sudan, amongst others were all made possible by the APF together with some irregular support of other external actors.

The general rule is that 'the formal decision-making process for each operation funded by the APF is launched upon a request from the AU and/or from a sub-regional organization RECs/RMs. When a sub-regional organization takes an initiative, the political approval of the AU is required for external actors like the EU to fund it (EU Commission, 2017: 5). The beneficiaries of the APF include AU, RECs/RMs and relevant institutions/structures within or related to the APSA. Moreover, the ongoing call for the use of the UN assessed contribution for African-led peace operations since 2007 is also a motivating factor for unity in line the AU. A respondent from the AU PSOD explains that:

> we have over 12 subregional organizations, how can external partners like the
> EU engage all these partners who have similar mandates on the continent?
> Hence, the AU provides that coordinating platform to engage with all the

relevant African actors. APF requires sub-regions to seek authorization from the AU. Partners need consistency through one continental partner. The EU has invested a lot on supporting the AU to meet some standards to enable us to work together. Do you know how much time wastage and duplicity it will take them to develop independent standards with many RECs and ad hoc arrangements?

In view of the self-sufficiency of some RECs, a pertinent question is whether sub-regions will actually seek the approval of the AU prior to undertaking peace initiatives if the quest to access donor funds is not on the table. Indeed, the cohesion of APSA under the AU will be tested with the new EPF which does not require the AU endorsement for support to subregional organizations in Africa. These funding dynamics sheds some light into the role of external actors in the con-joints and disjoints in APSA. Given that foreign powers contribute the bulk of AU and RECs's financial resources for peace operations, foreign actors have a huge influence on the cohesiveness of APSA.

The AU Comparative Advantage in the Contexts of Weak RECs

Most RECs have peace and security mandates, but their capacity to make meaningful impact depend on their level of development and integration. While some sub-regions are self-sufficient and active, the AU has significant comparative advantage in situations where weaker RECS exist. In central Africa for instance, ECCAS which was established since 1983 has been one of the weaker RECs along with the AMU which is virtually non-existent in northern Africa. ECCAS is weakened by its composition of fragile and crises states that are engrossed with solving internal security threats (ICG 2011). The DRC and CAR are engrossed in conflict while Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon and Gabon are governed by long-serving authoritarian regimes that are insecure about their future.

In this context, it remains challenging to find ECCAS member states with significant moral or political influence to get another member to adhere by norms. For instance, since violence erupted in the Anglophone part of Cameroon in 2018, ECCAS members have not taken initiative to put the situation on the sub-region's agenda or bring it up for discussion at the level of the AU. Unlike ECCAS, the AU is making better headway in terms of making statements about the crises and has shown willingness to support national dialogue in Cameroon and 'assist the Cameroonian stakeholders overcome the challenges at hand' (AU PSC Report 2020). Nevertheless, the challenge is that if RECs are unwilling to resolve crises, the AU tends to be hamstrung in terms of intervention. This is because the AU relies significantly on the influence and interests of member states of sub-regions to seek solutions to crises in their neighboring countries. Yet, in this context, the AU has the comparative advantage to bring together the different actors to initiate a coordinated intervention.

In CAR for instance, the AU and ECCAS have taken turns in addressing the crises. The Mission de consolidation de la paix en Centrafrique (MICOPAX) had been in the country since 2002 firstly with the name Multinational Force in the Central African Republic (FOMUC) because it was under the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC). The mission was then handed to ECCAS in 2008 to maintain some stability in the country. The mission was heavily reliant on external support particularly from France but was ineffective in the face of coups and political instability. In 2012, when violence broke out, the AU took over the existing mission and transformed it into the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) in 2013 to stabilize the country. Subsequently, the AU is leading the African mediation effort in the country along with ECCAS, ICGLR and other partners within a framework known as the AU-led African Initiative (Ani 2017). The AU was

able to exert its leadership primarily due to the relative weakness of ECCAS. While commenting on the inherence checks and balances within the subsidiarity principle of the 2008 MoU, a respondent from the AU argues that

> In the case of the CAR for instance, ECCAS started but they did not have the capacity to complete the mission, then the AU took over and afterwards the UN took over following complications in the AU mission. Hence, interventions are incrementalist from the sub-region, then continental and international but the involvement of all the parties from the get go is crucial for lasting peace.

The situation in Libya also shows that the AU could play a significant role where weak RECs exist but to a limited extent. When conflict erupted in Libya in 2011, the AU was keen on intervening in the crises but it lacked the relevant influence on the ground due to weakness and non-existence of the AMU. The weakness of the AU and the absence of a strong REC led to the intervention of the UN and NATO. The AU on the other hand continually struggle to find relevance in the peace process before and after the killing of President Muammar Gaddafi by NATO-backed local forces. Since 2016, the AU has been making rhetoric's about initiating a national dialogue to foster the resolution of the conflict between the warring parties in Libya (PSC Report 2018). But it has been unable to do so due to lack of leverage on the ground. Yet, the AU has the comparative advantage to intervene in the context of the weak/absent REC, but it has to explore avenues to get neighboring member states to cooperate.

Furthermore, the AU has some comparative advantage in situations were strong RECs become weak due to the instability within the powerful/pivotal member states of the RECs. It is no doubt that most RECs are strongly driven by one or two strong member states.[5] Indeed, some RECs become weak when the strong members fall into instability and the REC is unable to address the security threat. For instance, during the xenophobic attacks against foreigners in South Africa as well as the #ENDSARS campaign in Nigeria, the SADC and the ECOWAS were relatively weak in addressing the situation given that these countries are the pace-setters and backbones of the RECs.

As such, the AU has a comparative advantage in stepping in to work with the respective RECs. While responding to a question on the specific roles of the AU and RECs, Dr Linda Darkwa notes the limitations in the subsidiarity and the uncertainties it creates around when, and if, the AU can step in:

> We have an incident in our hands (mid 2020) in West Africa where president of Ivory Coast who was also the chair of ECOWAS had decided that he was going to stand for a third term in his country. Who is going to be able to speak to him? It cannot be ECOWAS because the president of ECOWAS reports to the Chair of ECOWAS. There is so much the president of ECOWAS can say. In such an instance, it is the African Union that needs to step in. This is because by the concept of subsidiarity, if it is challenging for the entity that is closest to the problem to engage then the entity that is farther away which has leverage is expected to step in. We need to contextualize and really refine the concept of

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[5] This is true also at the level of the AU. However, it is envisaged that if an influential member is unstable, other stronger member states and the cumulative membership of the AU could give the continental body the required strength to intervene unlike in RECs were there are often one or two influential members.

subsidiarity and once we do that the whole issue of division of Labor will fall in line (Darkwa 2020: Online Interview).

Indeed, in the situations in South Africa and Nigeria, the AU's statements and interjections were more influential than those of their respective RECs. This is also relevant in the case of Ethiopia were the AU deployed special envoys to engage the government during the conflict with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in November 2020. In this case, IGAD – where Ethiopia is one of the lead and influential party – was unable to engage the crises situation. As such, the AU has a significant potential of having comparative advantage in contexts of weaknesses within RECs.

Multiplicity of Sub-regional organizations

A critical factor that influences who intervenes in African crises is the multiplicity of RECs as well as the overlapping membership of African states in the RECs (Striebinger, 2016). The creation of subregional organisations is part of the grand African plan for development and gradual continent-wide integration as outlined in the AEC Treaty and the AU Constitutive Act. These treaties went as far as calling for the establishment of sub-regional organisations where they do not exist (AEC Treaty 1991). With time however, it dawned on the continental body that the call for the creation of additional RECs may have become a policy imperative gone too far. In 2006, the AU Assembly placed moratorium on the recognition of additional RECs which were mushrooming across the continent uncontrollably (AU Assembly 2006).

With 8 regional organizations recognized by the AU, the RECs on the continent exceed the five geographical groupings in Africa – North, East, Central, West and South. Sub-regions such as AMU, ECOWAS, SADC, ECCAS as well as IGAD and EAC exist within the five geographical regions but COMESA and CEN-SAD includes members beyond one specific region. Indeed, most African states belong to two or more sub-regional organizations. The situation is complicated by the fact that member states are still making request for membership beyond their regions. For instance, the DRC recently requested to be a member of the EAC despite being part of ECCAS and SADC (AU PSC Report 2020). Tunisia and Morocco have both made requests to join ECOWAS in 2017. Tunisia has also requested to join the COMESA and ECCAS. Burundi has also applied to be a member of the SADC.

The multiplicity of RECs and the overlapping membership has severe impact on APSA's effectiveness including the rise of ad hoc coalitions and member states politicking on who intervenes in their crises situations.

The Rise of Ad Hoc Coalitions

Most respondents observe that when member states are unable to secure a REC that is favourable to their cause, they form ad hoc regional arrangements. Ad hoc arrangement have become critical enforcement mechanisms for member states who are unwilling to go through the AU and RECs bureaucracies. Notably, conflicts which occur across the borders of sub-regional organizations often raise concerns about which sub-region should intervene especially due to the limitations in coordination arrangements between two or more RECs on the continent. De Coning notes that:

In many of the actual cases that we have dealt with over the last decade like Mali or Central African Republic, the situations occur on the border of two RECs. That further questions whether the RECs are actually viable structure on

their own. Are they sufficient on their own as the building blocks of the AU or the additional structures like *ad hoc* regional mechanisms are necessary? If we look at the G5 Sahel or MNJTF we see various other mechanisms in addition to the RECs that perform a similar role to what we thought the RECs could play. I think the idea that the RECs – and only the RECs – are the building blocks of the AU is perhaps being increasingly questioned and some of these assumptions are now up for further debate and development (De Coning 2020: Online Interview).

Although the AU should have some comparative advantage to coordinate interventions in contexts involving 2 or more RECs, the multiple interests and priorities of the organization often hinders its swift intervention. Some conflict affected states have opted to overcome the bureaucracies of the AU and the absence of coordination between sub-regions to form *ad hoc* arrangements to address their specific challenges as reflected by the case of the recently established G5 Sahel Joint Force.

Since the Mali crises worsened in 2012, a number of states in the region – Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger and Mauritania – have been victims of attacks by jihadist elements from Mali. While Mali is part of ECOWAS, some of the affected members are not members of the West African bloc. Mauritania had pulled out of ECOWAS in 2000 while Chad belongs to ECCAS. Hence, the AU had stepped in to play a coordination role to address the security crises. In 2013, the AU initiated the Nouakchott Process on the enhancement of security cooperation and the operationalisation of the APSA in the Sahelo-Saharan region at a meeting in Mauritania (AU PSC 2015). Eleven countries – Algeria, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Chad – are part of the Nouakchott Process.

Through the Nouakchott Process, the AU PSC envisaged a possibility to establish an African force to undertake offensive action against the terror groups operating in Mali and the broader Sahel region as part of its Sahel Strategy (AU PSC 2015). However, the AU and other members of the Nouakchott Process that are not directly affected by the terrorism from Mali were reluctant and slow to establish the mission while the terror group continued to terrorize the Sahel region. Hence, the affected countries of the G5 Sahel[6] – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger – decided to establish the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel in February 2017 comprising up to 5,000 personnel to address the security threats.

Members of the G5 Sahel[7] provide the required troops and contribute some funds for the mission. But due to resource constraints and in line with traditional practice, the G5 Sahel sought external funding by seeking the approval of the AU PSC which opens doors for international support, quite in line with the procedure laid out by the APF.[8] The G5 Sahel joint force case shows that AU's technical approval was all that is required to secure funds for affected members to carry out their operations. As noted earlier, the transition to a European Peace Facility (EPF) will test the commitment of RECs and coalitions to the AU's primacy. Hence, the reality is that the multiplicity of RECs and the lack of coordination will continually

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[6] In 2014, the G5 Sahel was established to foster economic cooperation and security in the Sahelian region.

[7] The situation is similar with the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) fighting Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin where concerned member states that fall between two main sub-regional organization, decided to lead a coalition against Boko Haram. The conflict primarily affects Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. Chad and Cameroon belong to ECCAS while Niger and Nigeria are within ECOWAS. However, there are not effective coordination and joint mechanism in place for ECCAS and ECOWAS to create a joint intervention.

[8] Recently however, the AU pledged to provide about 3000 forces from the ASF to support the G5 Sahel (AU Statement 2020).

engender the rise of coalitions that eventually weaken the grand alliance envisaged around the core APSA institutions. The AU is currently exploring how to establish a Special Unit for Counter-Terrorism within the ASF framework to address the gaps leading to the formation of ad hoc arrangements (AU PSC Report 2020: page 16). Nevertheless, the reality of the intervention landscape is the bases for De Coning's argument for a flexible and 'just-in-time arrangement' because each conflict situation require a unique solution and 'different crystallization of a coalition of the willing' to respond like in the cases of G5 Sahel, MNJTF as well as UNAMID and AMISOM (De Coning 2020: Online Interview). Hence, the most appropriate mechanism for conflict response has to do with who has the comparative advantage and which countries is willing to deploy and who is willing to fund it (De Coning 2016).

Interests of Member States: Picking and Choosing Who Intervenes

In view of the multiplicity of APSA interveners, affected member state and neighboring states also pick and choose who intervenes in line with their specific interests whether they are positively or negative. An analyst at the SADC stressed that the

> sovereignty of member states entails that they can influence the intervention process by determining who intervenes in their crises because there are no clear-cut mechanism of addressing crises situations within APSA. This makes it difficult to apply relevant leverage for a positive outcome.

The Burundi crises of 2015 shows how the governments of conflict affected states and interested neighboring states pick and choose which APSA actor intervenes. When violence and protests resurged in 2015 following President Nkurunziza's alleged bid for 'third term' presidency, the government preferred the mediatory role of the EAC which was led by President Museveni of Uganda. Museveni himself has been in power for about 29 years at the time thereby raising concerns about his role in a presidential term issue from the start (Khadiagala, 2018). Under Museveni, Uganda had scrapped presidential term limits in 2005 and subsequently scrapped age limits in 2018. Accordingly, the EAC mediators where criticized for failing to take into account concerns of the opposition.

Additionally, when the AU PSC – meeting at an ambassadorial level – made attempt to play a significant role in the crises by sending an African Prevention & Protection Mission in Burundi (*MAPROBU*) to protect civilians, the mission was rejected by the Burundian government. Eventually, the AU PSC at the level of Heads of States in January 2016 overturned the decision to establish MAPROBU (AU PSC 2016). This was due to objections from Burundi and members of EAC particularly Tanzania as well as The Gambia under Yahya Jammeh (William 2016).[9] Commenting on the development, Darkwa observes that:

> It is the political heads who make a decision whether to deploy or not to deploy. And when you do not have political consensus, it becomes a challenge. We saw that in Burundi there was no consensus on deployment and so the African Union could not deploy an intervention brigade but I also think that Burundi was the first test case. The AU had just declared the African Standby Force (ASF) operational in the later part of 2016 and this was December when the PSC meeting at the level of the ambassadors proposed that they deploy the ASF in

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[9] The AU established the High-Level Delegation to Burundi in January 2016, they comprise five Heads of State and chaired by President Jacob Zuma. But the high-level delegation only went to Burundi in February 2016 and never went there again.

Burundi. It was their very first attempt to deploy the ASF. The issue was not even whether or not they could deploy. Rather, the issue was whether or not the PSC meeting at the level of ambassadors have the authority to make that declaration and I think that Burundi helped to provide clarity to that. The AU Constitutive Act reserves the right for intervention to heads of state and not to their representatives. That was their test cases that had been clarified. In the case of ECOWAS, the heads of states made a decision that they were going to deploy into Gambia. This shows how it is relatively easier for RECs who often meet at the Heads of State level, to deploy missions. This is unlike the AU where meetings on security threats are often held at the ambassadorial level (Darkwa 2020: Online Interview).

With the change of plans, the AU commissioned a human rights and military observer mission to investigate the abuses. But the Burundi government never allowed the mission to take hold and the AU has been unable to have influence in the country. Although the AU sent a high-level delegation to Burundi with members coming from the five regions of Africa, the delegation never made impact on the ground. The AU rather relied on the EAC-led mediation which maintained former president Nkurunziza in power. He eventually stepped aside for his party ally Évariste Ndayishimiye to contest the election in 2020 before his demise in the same year. Prior to his demise, he also led a constitutional review process in 2018 which could have permitted him to contest for subsequent elections (ISS Today 2018). Yet the limited checks and balances in the APSA framework made it difficult for the AU to take a decisive role in mediating in Burundi. Indeed, the multiplicity of RECs and potential interveners have made it possible that African states could choose an intervening power.

Conclusion

Thus far, the article has examined the complex political dynamics of intervention by the APSA institutions including the AU and subregional organizations. The article shows that a clear-cut division of labour is untenable because the responsibility for intervention within APSA is context-specific and often determined by a fluid concept of subsidiarity and comparative advantage. Roles within APSA are determined by multi-factors such as the capabilities of the affected sub-regions, the interests of member states, the cross-regional dimensions of conflicts and the limitations of the cooperation guidance within APSA.

Strong RECs such as ECOWAS, SADC (and to some extent IGAD) exhibit high sense of self-reliance in terms of conflict prevention and management. While the AU often endorse the decisions of these strong RECs, the limited cooperation guidelines and inadequate coordinating mechanisms often creates tensions between the AU and sub-regions. This is evident from conflict settings such as Mali were the AU and ECOWAS compete for leading intervention roles.

The situation is different in contexts of weaker RECs where the AU has a comparative leverage to intervene but is still constrained by the limited role of the affected sub-region. In Central Africa, the weaknesses of ECCAS hampers its intervention roles in conflict settings such as the CAR where the AU assumes leadership roles but in cooperation with ECCAS and other stakeholders. In North Africa, the absence of a functioning REC impedes the effectiveness of the AU's role in the Libyan crises for instance.

Additionally, the multiplicity of sub-regional organizations and the cross-regional dimensions of conflicts have also blurred the lines of responsibility between RECs. While the AU has some

advantage to bring together the affected RECs, the delays and institutional bureaucracies within the AU have often led to the rise of ad hoc coalitions that seek expedient responses to security threats as highlighted by the G5 Sahel Force case. Due to the multiplicity of interveners in Africa, member states also pick and choose which APSA institution intervenes in its crises situation. During the 2015 third term crises in Burundi for instance, the government preferred the mediatory effort of the EAC which was led by the long-serving President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni. The government opposed to the role of the AU which was willing to deploy an intervention mission to prevent human rights violations.

The prominent lesson in this regard is that a clear-cut division of responsibility at this stage in APSA trajectory in untenable. However, the AU and subregions ought to develop a sequential guiding framework for their working modalities and enhance their coordination mechanisms to reduce tensions and attain efficiency. The sequential framework involves a clearly stated guidance on the principle of subsidiarity that technically enjoins sub-regions to operate as first responders while the AU provides backstop to the interventions including stepping in when sub-regions are unable to respond (De Coning 2020: Online Interview). More specifically, in context where a strong RECs exist like ECOWAS and SADC, the AU should focus on supporting resource mobilization. In contexts with weaker RECs, the AU should play a stronger role in coordinating relevant actors and leading the intervention with significant consultation and collaboration with the affected REC.

Secondly, the AU and sub-regions should prioritize aligning their institutions and mechanisms as provided by the AU constitutive act and relevant protocols. This also entails enhancing the roles of their liaison offices including having a permanent representation by the AU and RECs. The AU and RECs should also establish focal persons or liaison offices amongst themselves to enhance coordination on common cross-RECs challenges. This will help to reduce indecision among RECs as well as the emergencies of ad hoc arrangements.

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