



## Media and Research Services



# Amani Forum Report

**The Role of the A3 in advancing the common interest of Africa  
in the UNSC: Bridging the gap between its potential and reality**

## The Role of the A3 in advancing the common interest of Africa in the UNSC: Bridging the gap between its potential and reality

On 24 March 2021, Amani Africa Media and Research Services (Amani Africa), with support from its partners convened Amani Africa Forum focusing on the role of the African three (A3) members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council (UNSC), in support of and as a follow up to the session of the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) held on 4 March 2021 on the subject.

The Forum had three objectives. First, it presented a platform for taking stock of the recent experiences of the member states of the A3 in playing their role in promoting common African positions in the UNSC. Second, it offered an opportunity for probing the various factors that affect the role of the A3 and for exploring ways and means of consolidating best practices and addressing existing challenges. Third, the Forum also sought to discuss the modalities for operationalizing the mechanisms identified in the communiqué of the 983<sup>rd</sup> session of the PSC.

In terms of methodology, the Forum used the direct experiences of two recent members of the A3 namely Ethiopia and South Africa and the perspective of the UN Office to the African Union (UNOAU). Accordingly, the forum received three presentations: Following the presentation from Mr. Gerald Mitchel, Deputy Head of the UNOAU, the Forum received rich insights on the experiences of two recent A3 members from Mr. Dawit Yirga of Ethiopia and Mr. Marthinus Van Schalkwyk of South Africa, who served as the Political Coordinators of the Permanent Missions of the two countries when they were members of the UNSC during 2017-2018 and 2019-2020, respectively. The Forum also benefited from Amani Africa's [Special Research Report No. 9](#) launched during the event.

Following the opening remarks by the Founding

Director of Amani Africa, Dr. Solomon Ayele Dersso, the presentations of the three speakers provided insights on the evolution of the role of the A3 and its current status, emerging best practices in institutionalizing the role of the A3 and coordination with various role players as well as existing and emerging challenges facing the A3.

The overview that Mitchel provided on the role of the A3 highlighted practices relating to coordination among the members of the A3, between the A3 and the AU Permanent Observer Mission to the UN and between the A3 and the PSC as well as between the A3 and other members of the UNSC and the support from the UN Secretariat. It was observed that the A3 delivered some 38 joint statements during 2020, indicating increasing levels of collective action by the A3.

The factors affecting A3 effectiveness were also highlighted by presenters drawing on the experiences of Ethiopia and South Africa. One such factor is dual identity of the members of the A3 (representing national interest vs representing Africa) and the related issue of dominance of strongly held national policy on some issues (example on Western Sahara). Related to this is also the issue of subsidiarity and emergence of divergent policy positions among States, RECs and the AU (example: 2019 DRC Election and the lack of alignment in the position of SADC and the initial view of the AU, as expressed by the outgoing Chairperson of the AU on the outcome of the election). The other factor is the lack of regular flow of information between A3 and AU PSC, with adverse impacts on the adoption of a common position by the A3. Presenters also underscored the internal dynamics of the UNSC and the pressure that is exerted on the A3 from permanent members of the UNSC, particularly the A3 as well as the failure of the P5 to give due attention to the views of the A3.

In terms of measures that could help address the

various factors that adversely impact on the effectiveness of the role of the A3, the lessons identified during the seminar from the presentations and the ensuing discussions include the following:

- The imperative of institutionalizing the unity of the A3 in speaking as a collective to maximize their influence in UNSC decision-making;
- Consolidating the practice of issuing joint-statements, tabling joint resolutions as well as joint press briefing by the A3;
- The importance of organising joint-meetings of the subsidiary organs and Arria-formula meetings by the A3;
- The need for a clear PSC position that is communicated timeously to the A3 for them to adopt a coordinated stand at the UNSC;
- The need for beefing up the technical and staffing capacity of members of the A3 both in New York and Addis Ababa to shoulder effectively the burden of membership in the UNSC as A3 as well as to assume leading role on African files including by holding or co-holding the pen;
- The need to maintain close and regular support from Capital and the Africa group for the A3 to limit the adverse impact of the immense external pressure from the P5, specially the P3;
- The importance of ensuring coordination of Program of Work (PoW) of the two Councils: this is particularly important in terms of obtaining a PSC position ahead of UNSC meetings
- The need for capacitating the AU Observer Mission in New York for better coordination among the A3 as well as between the A3 and PSC;
- Regularizing the briefings on A3

activities to the African group in New York;

- Enhancing expert level coordination and engagement among political coordinators of the A3 in New York and PSC experts in Addis Ababa;
- Institutionalizing avenues for taping into the experience of the outgoing members of A3 in A3 meetings;
- Expanding the A3+ arrangements for consultation and coordination purposes as well as mobilizing support for common African positions;
- Undertaking joint missions by the PSC and the A3;
- The need for the PSC and the A3 to adopt a roadmap in order to craft the engagement of the A3 strategically;
- The need for the A3 to push for moving forward the initiative for joint-visits; and
- The need for expanding the current practice of briefings to the A3 by senior UN officials by using virtual space to have briefings from AU Commissioners and special representatives to A3.

In terms of operationalizing some of these measures, the discussion during the Forum drew attention to mandate renewals as an example of issues in respect of which the PSC can provide guidance ahead of time as the timelines are known very well in advance. Commending the value of Forums such as this, the important role played by NGOs and think-tanks in better clarifying the different dynamics at both Councils as well as in facilitating the link between the PSC and the A3 was also stressed.

On the question of finalizing discussions on modalities for joint field missions by the PSC and the UNSC, it was pointed out that the main factor is the

difference in the institutional set up of the two bodies. While the AU PSC operates as a collective, in the UNSC members of the Council act and speak in their national capacities. It was rightly observed that a major step towards achieving progress on this issue is recognizing such differences between the two bodies. Once this is understood, there needs to be compromise from both Councils on how to proceed in conducting joint field visits based on proposals that are on the table. Recalling that both Councils have in principle agreed to implement such initiatives, speakers underscored that the key is to determine the mechanisms, which requires action from the AU PSC and clear guidance to the A3 who can then push the issue at the UNSC.

In terms of exploring specific areas of influence for the A3 that participants raised during the discussion, speakers shared useful insights on whether and where there is value in serving in UNSC sub-committees, including subcommittees dealing with thematic and technical issues such as arms embargos, counter-terrorism and UNSC Resolution 1540. It was noted that given that the work of sub-committees can be demanding and since the A3 only have limited number of experts, the A3 have to be selective and strategic in serving as members of subcommittees. The insights shared on the politics of sanctions committees made it clear that chairing sanctions committees comes with enormous burden and the difficulties of being the face of the committee and managing the pressure of divergent positions of big powers.

Additionally, pending UNSC reform, an important area for enhancing the influence of the A3 that a speaker highlighted was the informal working group on the working methods of the UNSC. Through championing changes in the working methods, there is space for the A3 to expand their standing and voice in the UNSC.

The issue of A3 cooperation with respect to non-African issues and how such issues affect the work

of the A3 was another area where the discussions focused. Speakers observed that at times positions taken with respect to non-African issues affect coordination on African files. They also indicated statements that the AU Commission Chairperson issues

Another important point of discussion addressed in length was the coordination between A3 and the elected non-permanent members of the UNSC (E10 members), specially while dealing with non-African issues (which indirectly do impact advancing African positions while dealing with African agenda items). While the importance of coordination within the E10 was underscored, it was noted that a lot of the dynamics of such coordination largely depends on the make-up of the E10. For example, overrepresentation of one group in the E10 (creation of a block) makes coordination at that level difficult whereas countries acting in their individual capacity in the E10 creates a better chance to reach common positions. A good example is South Africa's experience in working with the E10 for a joint statement of the E10 on the working mechanisms of UNSC in 2019.

The conflict prevention role of the UNSC and the contribution of A3 in that respect was also raised during the discussion. All panellists emphasised in that respect, that UNSC's role in conflict situations shouldn't be limited to responding to specific crises. In terms of A3's role in UNSC's conflict prevention mandate, A3's attempt to launch the issue of exploitation of natural resources was mentioned as an example.

The seminar was concluded with founding director of Amani Africa thanking speakers for their rich insights, participants for their presence and the Embassies of UK, Switzerland, Germany and Ireland for their support



## MEDIA AND RESEARCH SERVICES

### ADDRESS

Off Olympia roundabout  
Dem. Rep. Congo St  
Hailu Wolde Building  
kirkose subcity, Woreda 01  
House no.263/unit 02 first floor  
Tel: +251118678809  
Mobile: +251944723204  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

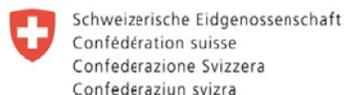
### ABOUT US

Amani Africa is an independent African based policy research, training and consulting think tank that operates as the first and only institution with a specialization and primary focus on Africa's multilateral policy processes notably that of the African union, anchored on the Peace and Security Council.

We support the pan-African dream of peaceful, prosperous and integrated Africa through research, training strategic communications, technical advisory services and convening and facilitation.

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