

POLICY BRIEF

# AU'S REVIEW OF THE AFRICAN PEACE AND SECURITY ARCHITECTURE SHOULD FOCUS ON IMPLEMENTATION DEFICIT

AMANI AFRICA

Media and Research Services



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## I. INTRODUCTION

In an address to chiefs of intelligence services gathered in Mombasa, Kenya, in April 2026, President William Ruto of Kenya, who is the African Union (AU) Champion for Institutional reform, proclaimed that the African Union (AU), as it stands today, is not fit for purpose.<sup>1</sup> While it may seem evident given the increasing ineffectiveness of the AU in dealing with the challenges facing the continent, this statement does not exactly tell us what the AU is not fit for. It is true that Africa's peace, security and governance landscape is undergoing one of its most severe stress tests since the establishment of the African Union (AU). Despite the existence of one of the most elaborate regional peace and security frameworks, the continent continues to experience a proliferation of armed conflicts, unconstitutional changes of government, democratic regression and complex humanitarian emergencies. It is this growing gulf between the policy, normative and institutional arrangements of the AU and the peace and security realities of the continent that, in part, led to the call for the reform of the AU, including its peace and security system.

As the series of high-level discussions convened since December 2025 by Amani Africa <sup>2</sup> revealed Africa's core challenge is not the absence of norms, institutions

<sup>1</sup> Amani Africa, 'Breaking: H.E. Kenya's President @WilliamsRuto, told intelligence chiefs meeting in Mombasa that...', X (formerly Twitter), 13 April 2026, available at: [https://x.com/africa\\_amani/status/2043598096358097040](https://x.com/africa_amani/status/2043598096358097040)

<sup>2</sup> Amani Africa Media and Research Services, 'Amani Africa Forums', [amaniafrica-et.org](http://amaniafrica-et.org), 29 April 2026, <https://amaniafrica-et.org/amani-africa-forums/>, available at: <https://amaniafrica-et.org/amani-africa-forums/>

or policy frameworks, but rather the translation of these normative, policy and institutional frameworks into effective policy action. There is now consensus that the source of ineffectiveness of the AU lies in declining political commitment and shared vision, lack of proactive engagement and robust political strategy, gaps in technical analysis and diplomatic leadership for mobilizing active participation and support from member states, slow decision-making, poor follow up of decisions adopted on conflict situations and fragmented institutional practices, inconsistent enforcement, and an enduring gap between early warning and early action, exacerbated by funding challenges.

The policy brief argues that the current APSA-AGA review process represents a critical opportunity to move beyond incremental institutional adjustments and instead confront the deeper political and structural constraints that have limited the AU's impact. It highlights that the proposed review of the APSA/AGA will only be meaningful if anchored in a clear diagnosis of what is ailing the AU. Based on the discussions during these events and the various analyses published, this Policy Brief situates the ongoing APSA-AGA review within a broader political, security and geopolitical context, underscoring that the ultimate measure of reform will not lie in institutional design alone, but in its demonstrable capacity to respond to real-world crises and restore confidence in Africa's collective peace, security and governance frameworks. This policy brief concludes with detailed policy recommendations aimed at translating reform ambitions into tangible outcomes on the ground.

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on the revitalisation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), supported by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland.

## II. BACKGROUND TO THE APSA REVIEW: CONTEXTUALISING AU INSTITUTIONAL REFORM AMID ESCALATING CRISES

The AU's institutional reform agenda, initiated following the 2015 Johannesburg Summit and reinforced through subsequent decisions in Kigali and beyond, was conceived as a corrective to persistent concerns about the effectiveness, credibility and sustainability of how the continental body delivers on its mandate. At its core, the reform agenda sought to strengthen African ownership, rationalise institutional arrangements, enhance financial autonomy, and ensure that the AU is capable of acting decisively in an increasingly complex and volatile global environment.

Nearly a decade on, the rationale for reform has become both more urgent and more stark. Across the continent, armed conflicts have proliferated. Unconstitutional changes of government have re-emerged as a mode of change of leadership or disrupting governance failures. Democratic norms have weakened. And humanitarian crises have deepened. These dynamics are further compounded by climate-induced vulnerabilities, structural socio-economic deprivation and intensifying external geopolitical competition. Crucially, these trends have unfolded despite the existence of the APSA and AGA, calling

into question not only their effectiveness but also whether 'how they are deployed' is fit for purpose in responding to contemporary and interlinked crises.

This widening gap between institutional ambition and lived security realities has catalysed renewed political attention to the AU's peace and security framework. At the 38th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly in February 2025, Kenya's President William Ruto, serving as AU Champion for Institutional Reform, proposed eight priority measures to accelerate reform implementation. Central among these was a call to review APSA, premised on the explicit acknowledgement that 'the dire peace and security situation in Africa partly indicts the continent's peace architecture.' This acknowledgement was not unprecedented. As early as July 2023, the PSC, at its 1163rd ministerial-level meeting, had requested the AU Commission to initiate a review of APSA to adapt it to Africa's evolving, multidimensional and increasingly transnational security challenges.

The convergence of Assembly-level recognition of the pressing need for reform and sustained PSC concern culminated in a formal decision to undertake the review process. The AU Assembly authorised the Chairperson of the AU Commission, in consultation with the AU Champion for Institutional Reform, to appoint a High-Level Panel of five Eminent African Experts to undertake a comprehensive review of the AU's peace and security framework. Following the assumption of office of the new AU Commission leadership in March 2025, this mandate was translated into action through the constitution of the High-Level Panel. The Panel commenced its

work in September 2025 with a strategic review meeting bringing together experts and practitioners engaged in peace and security policymaking and implementation.

While this institutional process marks an important step forward, it has also exposed critical analytical and political gaps that risk undermining the reform effort if left unaddressed. First, there is a pressing need for reform proposals to be grounded in rigorous, evidence-based analysis that interrogates not only **what** has failed within APSA and related governance arrangements, but **why** these failures have persisted. Second, for the review to successfully see the light of day, it needs to mobilise broad-based political ownership and sustained engagement among AU member states, regional economic communities, civil society actors and policy practitioners, so that reform outcomes reflect shared understanding of all key stakeholders and translate into implementation rather than remaining declaratory.

The policy dialogues underpinning this brief emerged from a shared recognition that Africa is confronting a moment of strategic inflexion. Several participants in the various forums characterised the current conjuncture as a 'shock', a convergence of internal fragilities and external pressures that demands not incremental adjustment but transformative change. Shifting global power dynamics, intensified competition among external actors, and a weakening commitment to multilateralism have further constrained Africa's strategic autonomy. In this context, the AU's capacity to act coherently, credibly and decisively on peace, security and governance is no longer a technical

or procedural concern; it is a strategic imperative for safeguarding African agency, sovereignty and relevance in a contested global order.<sup>3</sup>

### III. WHAT SHOULD THE APSA REVIEW ENTAIL?

There is a clear convergence from the various forums around one central point: **the ongoing review of APSA and the broader peace, security and governance architecture is not, and should not be, primarily a normative or treaty-rewriting exercise.** Participants consistently underscored that Africa's peace and governance challenge does not stem from weak legal foundations or the absence of policy instruments, but from persistent gaps in implementation, enforcement, coordination and political commitment. It was argued that no amount of perfection of the existing normative or institutional frameworks will result in enhanced effectiveness of the AU's role in peace and security.<sup>4</sup>

From this perspective, the review is best understood as a strategic and political stocktaking exercise, rather than a technocratic redesign of frameworks. Its core purpose, as articulated in the various convenings, is **to interrogate**

<sup>3</sup> El-Ghassim Wane, *Africa at a crossroads: Pan-Africanism, Global Disorder and Collective Security*, Ideas Indaba, 27 February 2026 <https://amaniafrica-et.org/africa-at-a-crossroads-pan-africanism-global-disorder-and-collective-security/>

<sup>4</sup> Amani Africa, *Memo to the new AU Commission leadership from the roaring guns on AU's first decade of silencing the guns*, Special Research Report (October 2024) <https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/MEMO-TO-THE-NEW-AU-COMMISSION-LEADERSHIP.pdf> p. 2.

**how existing norms, institutions and decision-making processes have functioned in practice, and why, despite their formal strength, they have failed to prevent conflict escalation, governance breakdowns and the resurgence of unconstitutional changes of government.**

### 3.1. Review of legal and policy instruments as a misplaced exercise

A recurring theme in the discussions was the idea that it would be a misplaced exercise for the review process to focus on any review of existing legal or policy instruments or the adoption of new ones. Participants warned of ‘normative saturation,’ arguing that the AU already possesses comprehensive legal and policy frameworks covering conflict prevention, mediation, sanctions, democratic governance, early warning and accountability. In this context, the idea for new instruments was viewed with scepticism, particularly where existing ones remain underutilised or selectively enforced.

Importantly, the forums did not rule out limited normative clarification or consolidation. Rather, they emphasised that any changes to instruments should be tightly scoped, evidence-based and clearly justified by demonstrated gaps, such as ambiguities in mandates, overlaps between organs, or inconsistencies between continental and regional frameworks. Participants cautioned that revising treaties or adopting new policy frameworks without addressing political and institutional behaviour risks deepening the disconnect between commitment and practice.

The prevailing view was therefore that the review should prioritise operationalisation over norm creation: strengthening compliance mechanisms, follow-up procedures, reporting obligations and accountability for non-implementation, rather than reopening settled normative debates. The strong consensus across various forums is that the focus should be on addressing the policy-to-implementation gap with a focus on the question of the process of initiating and deploying policy action.

### 3.2. Institutional Structures: Reforming Use, Not Multiplying Form

On institutional structures, discussions revealed a similar pattern of restraint. Participants acknowledged that institutional fragmentation, unclear division of labour and siloed decision-making have weakened the effectiveness of APSA and AGA. However, there was limited appetite for wholesale restructuring or the creation of new organs. Thus, instead of being seen as a platform for reviewing existing structures, the APSA/AGA review process should be framed as an opportunity to assess how existing structures are used, not whether they should exist. This includes examining:

- Whether the PSC, AU Commission and RECs are exercising their mandates proactively or defensively and have a clear understanding and mastery of how and when to initiate policy action leveraging the commitments that member states have already made;
- How political leadership is enabled or constrained by the internal institutional and personality dynamics;
- Whether integration efforts (including APSA–AGA coherence) clarify

responsibilities or diffuse accountability.

The discussions stressed that institutional reforms should focus on authority, incentives and leadership, rather than organisational charts. In their view, underperformance is less about structural design flaws than about reluctance or inability to deploy available tools decisively, lack of political weight and imagination and failure to command the support and respect of key constituencies, including member states.

### 3.3. What the Review Is and Is Not

Taken together, across the various forums, discussions suggest that the APSA–AGA review entails:

- A candid assessment of why strong norms have not translated into preventive and timely action;
- A political analysis of decision-making bottlenecks, risk aversion and selective enforcement;
- A reassessment of incentives, mandates and accountability mechanisms within existing structures.

## IV. CONFLICT AS A STRESS TEST: INSIGHTS FROM AFRICA'S CONTEMPORARY CRISES ON THE WHAT AND HOW OF APSA REFORM

The Overall discussions revealed that the challenges confronting APSA and AGA are neither accidental nor isolated, but the product of interlocking structural and political dynamics that have accumulated over time. Participants consistently returned to the paradox of a continent endowed with one of the world's most elaborate normative peace and

governance frameworks, yet struggling to translate these commitments into timely and credible action. Across debates on implementation, political will, institutional integration, early warning, responses to unconstitutional changes of government, and financing, a common thread emerged: underperformance is driven less by gaps in rules, mandates or analysis than by choices embedded in how institutions are used, resourced and politically navigated. Weak implementation, risk-averse decision-making, selective enforcement, and fragmented authority have collectively hollowed out deterrence and prevention, while attempts at institutional integration and partnership have at times blurred accountability rather than strengthening coherence. Taken together, the subsections that follow examine how these dynamics reinforce one another, how political will is shaped by institutional design, how early warning fails without political action, how governance breakdowns culminate in coups, and how financing shortfalls constrain African ownership, ultimately underscoring that meaningful reform will depend not on creating new frameworks, but on confronting the political economy of inaction that undermines existing ones.

### 4.1. A Strong Normative Framework, a Weak Implementation Record

One of the strongest points of convergence during the policy dialogue was the acknowledgement that the African Union possesses an exceptionally rich and comprehensive normative, legal and policy framework for peace, security and governance. Instruments such as the Constitutive Act of the AU, the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council, the African

Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, the Malabo Protocol, and a wide range of PSC decisions collectively provide Africa with a legal and political toolbox capable of addressing virtually all contemporary conflict scenarios.

Several participants stressed that, from a strictly legal perspective, Africa's norms on unconstitutional changes of government are among the strongest globally. The criminalisation of coups, provisions for individual accountability, restrictions on amnesty, and obligations on member states regarding extradition and non-recognition of unconstitutional regimes leave little ambiguity about expected behaviour. Similarly, APSA instruments empower the AU to engage in early warning, preventive diplomacy, mediation, sanctions and, under extreme circumstances, intervention.

Yet, despite this normative sophistication, implementation has remained strikingly weak. PSC decisions are frequently not followed through, sanctions are applied inconsistently, and early warning signals often fail to translate into timely political action. This implementation gap has had cumulative consequences: it has weakened deterrence, normalised non-compliance, and gradually eroded confidence in continental mechanisms.

Importantly, the discussions underscored that implementation failure is not simply a technical problem but a political one. Decisions depend on the willingness of member states to act collectively, even when doing so may conflict with narrow national interests or regime security concerns. As a result, the AU often finds itself constrained precisely when decisive action is most needed.

The review of APSA and AGA must therefore prioritise enforcement, follow-up and accountability mechanisms. Without addressing the political economy of implementation, further refinement of norms risks reinforcing a cycle of ambitious commitments followed by limited delivery.

## 4.2. Political Will: Constraint or Construct?

Political will emerged as the most frequently cited explanation for APSA's underperformance. However, the dialogue moved beyond treating political will as an abstract or immutable deficit. Instead, speakers argued that political will is shaped by incentives, leadership dynamics and institutional practice, and can therefore be influenced.

Historically, periods of relative effectiveness in Africa's peace and security responses coincided with strong leadership by influential member states at the regional level. Decisive interventions in West Africa and Southern Africa in earlier decades illustrated how regional hegemons, acting through RECs and supported by the AU, could generate momentum for conflict resolution. Today, however, such leadership has weakened as key states become preoccupied with domestic challenges or adopt more inward-looking postures.

At the continental level, political will is further constrained by the intergovernmental nature of the AU. While APSA instruments are legally binding, their enforcement ultimately depends on peer consensus. In an environment characterised by democratic regression and heightened regime insecurity, many governments are

reluctant to support robust action that could later be used against them.

Crucially, the dialogue emphasised that political will does not materialise spontaneously. It must be actively generated through: strategic use of the powers of initiative granted to the AU Commission Chairperson; consistent application of norms to avoid perceptions of selectivity; leveraging peer pressure, reputational costs and regional leadership; empowering semi-autonomous bodies such as the Panel of the Wise to act when political organs are constrained.

Reform efforts that do not explicitly address how political will is cultivated and sustained are unlikely to yield meaningful change.

### 4.3. APSA–AGA Integration: Coherence or Dilution?

The proposal to integrate APSA and AGA into a single coherent framework is among the most consequential elements of the current reform agenda. Proponents argue that peace, security and governance challenges are deeply interconnected and that institutional silos have undermined prevention by treating symptoms rather than root causes.

There was broad agreement that governance deficits, constitutional manipulation, exclusionary politics, weak accountability and human rights violations are central drivers of conflict in Africa. From this perspective, closer alignment between APSA and AGA could strengthen structural prevention and ensure that governance risks are addressed before they escalate into security crises.

However, the discussions also highlighted significant risks. Past experience with the merger of political affairs and peace and security functions within the AU Commission suggests that crisis-driven security priorities often overshadow long-term governance work. Given that governance reform is politically sensitive and resource-intensive, there is a real danger that integration could further marginalise this agenda.

If anything, based on the experience from the merger of political affairs and peace and security in the AU Commission, there is widespread belief that the merger of APSA and AGA should not go ahead. Considering the enormous significance of political affairs for conflict prevention and for mobilising political consensus for effective collective action, it was argued that the AU would do well to reverse the merger of political affairs and peace and security and restore the place of honour that political affairs should have in guiding both governance and peace and security decision-making.

Integration should thus be understood not as institutional consolidation for its own sake, but as a strategic reorientation towards prevention.

### 4.4. Early Warning without Early Action: Closing the Gap

The strategic review of the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) featured prominently in the dialogue as a microcosm of APSA's broader challenges. CEWS was conceived as a political prevention instrument designed to inform decision-making by the PSC and support timely preventive action. Over time, however, its impact has been limited by the weak translation of analysis

into action.

Participants noted that Africa is rarely surprised by crises. In many cases, early warning indicators, ranging from governance deterioration and human rights violations to security sector fragmentation, are well documented. Yet, these warnings often fail to trigger preventive engagement due to political hesitation, institutional ambiguity and member state resistance.

The CEWS strategic review identified several structural challenges: the absence of formalised triggering mechanisms, diluted institutional coherence following internal reforms, weakened AU–REC coordination, and a persistent culture of denial by some member states. Addressing these challenges requires more than technical upgrades.

While technological modernisation, including the use of artificial intelligence and big data analytics, can enhance predictive capacity, the dialogue stressed that the core problem remains political. Early warning must be embedded within a system that obliges political organs to respond, explain inaction, and accept accountability.

Closing the early warning–early action gap is therefore central to restoring APSA's credibility as a preventive architecture.

#### 4.5. Responding to Unconstitutional Changes of Government

The resurgence of unconstitutional changes of government has become one of the most visible indicators of APSA's declining deterrent capacity. Despite clear legal prohibitions and sanctions

regimes, military takeovers and other forms of unconstitutional power transfer have multiplied in recent years.

The dialogue underscored that coups are rarely isolated events. They are often the culmination of prolonged governance failures, including constitutional manipulation, electoral malpractice, shrinking civic space and socio-economic exclusion. When these warning signs are ignored, military intervention becomes easier to justify in the eyes of domestic and regional audiences.

Participants expressed concern that inconsistent responses to coups, both at continental and regional levels, have undermined credibility. Prolonged suspensions, while symbolically important, can isolate societies, weaken continental engagement and create opportunities for external actors to fill the vacuum.

A more effective approach requires rebalancing response and prevention. This includes engaging earlier on democratic backsliding, applying sanctions consistently, supporting expedited civilian-led transitions, and maintaining channels of engagement even during suspension. Without such adjustments, the AU risks remaining trapped in a reactive posture that treats symptoms rather than causes.

#### 4.6. Financing, Partnerships and African Ownership

Sustainable financing remains one of the most persistent structural constraints on the effectiveness of APSA and AGA. Heavy reliance on external partners for peace and security funding has undermined predictability, limited strategic autonomy

and complicated Africa's efforts to assert leadership in conflict response.

Participants acknowledged that external support has played an important role in enabling AU operations, including peace support missions. However, dependence on partner funding has also reinforced perceptions of external influence and constrained the AU's ability to act swiftly and independently.

The proposal to increase the AU Peace Fund represents a positive step, but financing reform must go beyond headline figures. It requires improved compliance with assessed contributions, diversification of funding sources, engagement with African financial institutions and the private sector, and stronger financial governance to build trust among member states.

Ultimately, African ownership is inseparable from financial responsibility. A Union that cannot reliably finance its own peace and security priorities will struggle to command political authority or negotiate partnerships on its own terms.

## V. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In a nutshell, the ongoing review of APSA and AGA presents a pivotal opportunity for Africa to move beyond the cycle of declaratory commitments and performative technical exercises towards a genuinely action-oriented peace and security architecture. The continent already possesses one of the most

sophisticated normative frameworks globally, yet persistent gaps in timely engagement, ability to initiate policy decisions that command the respect and support of member states and other stakeholders, political will, the provision of effective follow-up and implementation processes and mechanisms for policy decisions, enforcement, early action, and governance integration have eroded its credibility and preventive capacity. Meaningful reform, therefore, requires confronting these underlying political, leadership and institutional shortcomings, embedding accountability and incentives for timely action, strengthening African ownership, and aligning APSA–AGA functions around prevention rather than institutional merger.

Ultimately, the success of the review should not be assessed by the number of new committees, frameworks or reports produced, but by whether it changes how the AU organizes and deploys its response by **being the first** to be seized of and deliberate on emerging crisis, by **articulating policy decisions that command the support and respect of its member states**, by putting in place relevant follow up or implementation processes/mechanisms for implementing such decision and its willingness and ability to maintain high-level attention and engagement for ensuring that policy actions are effective to prevent conflicts before they escalate, respond credibly to ongoing crises such as Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Sahel, and address the governance deficits that lie at the heart of Africa's instability.

The following policy recommendations were extracted from across various policy

dialogue forums, including the one dedicated to APSA-AGA review held in December 2025, as a possible translator for these conclusions into concrete measures aimed at bridging the gap between reform ambition and tangible outcomes on the ground.

### **1. Shift decisively from norm creation to implementation enforcement**

The AU Assembly and PSC should prioritise systematic follow-up on decisions, including regular public reporting on implementation rates and consequences for non-compliance. Without credible enforcement, existing norms will continue to lose deterrent value.

### **2. Design APSA-AGA integration around prevention, not bureaucratic efficiency**

Any merged framework must explicitly safeguard governance, democracy and political affairs functions, ensuring they are not subordinated to crisis-driven security responses. Governance analysis should be institutionalised as a core input into PSC deliberations.

### **3. Institutionalise early action through clear triggers and accountability mechanisms**

Early warning products from CEWS should be linked to predefined political response options, timelines and responsible actors. Failure to act on credible warnings should trigger mandatory explanation and review within AU policy organs.

### **4. Strengthen the authority and independence of preventive diplomacy mechanisms**

The Panel of the Wise and the Chairperson's good offices should be empowered to act proactively, including

publicly flagging emerging risks and governance regressions even in politically sensitive contexts.

### **5. Adopt a genuinely preventive approach to unconstitutional changes of government**

The AU and RECs should engage earlier on constitutional manipulation, electoral malpractice and exclusionary governance practices, rather than intervening only after military takeovers have occurred.

### **6. Reinvigorate regional leadership and AU-REC complementarity**

The AU should actively support regional hegemon and capable states to exercise leadership in prevention and crisis response, while clarifying the division of labour to avoid duplication and paralysis.

### **7. Strengthen African ownership through predictable and sustainable financing**

Member states must meet assessed contributions, operationalise innovative financing mechanisms, and ensure the AU Peace Fund is adequately capitalised and transparently governed.

### **8. Mainstream youth and societal engagement in APSA and AGA implementation**

Given Africa's demographic realities, youth, civil society and local actors should be systematically integrated into early warning, prevention and peacebuilding efforts, moving beyond symbolic inclusion.

### **9. Benchmark reform success against active conflict situations**

The effectiveness of APSA-AGA reforms should be assessed through concrete case applications, such as Sudan, the Sahel and the Great Lakes—rather than internal process milestones.



## MEDIA AND RESEARCH SERVICES

### ABOUT AMANI AFRICA

Amani Africa is an independent African based policy research, training and consulting think tank with a specialization and primary focus on African multilateral policy processes, particularly those relating to the African union.

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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