

SPECIAL RESEARCH REPORT

RESTORING AFRICAN UNION LEADERSHIP IN PEACE AND SECURITY THROUGH PRIORITISING PEACE DIPLOMACY: INSIGHTS FROM EXPERT PANEL ON AU AND THE APSA

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President William Ruto of Kenya, Champion of AU Institutional Reform presenting a report on APSA review to the 39th session of AU Assembly, February 2026

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I. INTRODUCTION

The African Union (AU) and its peace and security order, known in conventional discourse as the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), are at a cross roads.¹ Internally, in addition to the expansion of the number and geographic spread of conflicts, the continent suffers from major deficit of collective leadership both on the part of states and at the level of pan-African multilateral bodies. Africa also faces a crisis of political and strategic cohesion owing, among others, to the erosion of commitment to and pursuit of the collective vision of Pan-Africanism.² At the global level, the international system is in a state of deep crises.

The APSA, made up of normative and institutional components, and its implementation between early 2000 and early 2010s presented Africa the platform that catalyzes the journey towards the realization of the long quest for pax Africana.³ A combination of factors including the provision of leadership by a group of leaders shaped by and seeking to overcome the horrors of war, not least of all the genocide against the Tutsi's in Rwanda, renewed interest in and mobilization for Pan-Africanism and

collective responsibility and a supportive international multilateral environment were critical both for the development of the APSA and its over a decade of relatively more successful efforts that contributed to reduction of conflicts in Africa. Some of the last innovative and robust initiatives of the AU in upholding its peace and security and governance norms were undertaken with the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan⁴ and PSC decision, invoking Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act, in relation to the crisis in Burundi in 2015.⁵

Over the past decade, as a special research report on the first ten-year implementation of AU's flagship peace and security agenda of Silencing the Guns⁶ revealed, the peace and security conditions and most worryingly the delivery of the APSA have come to run into major crises. The result has been the emergence and entrenchment of a new **era of conflicts** and insecurity.⁷

4 See AU, AU Doc. PSC/AHG/COMM.1(CDXI) 30 December 2013 available on <https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/411-south-sudan-30-12-2013.pdf>

5 See AU, AU Doc. PSC/PR/COMM.(DLXV) available on <https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/565-comm-burundi-17-12-2015.pdf>

6 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) available on <https://amaniafrica-et.org/memo-to-the-new-au-commission-leadership-from-the-roaring-guns-on-aus-first-decade-of-silencing-the-guns/>

7 Amani Africa, African Union Floating Adrift as a New Era of Insecurity Entrenches in Africa and Anarchy is Loosed upon the World, Special Research Report (February 2026) (African Union Floating Adrift) available on <https://amaniafrica-et.org/african-union-floating-adrift-as-a-new-era-of-insecurity-entrenches-in-africa-anarchy-is-loosed-upon-the-world-the-2025-review-of-the-peace-and-security-council-2/>

1 <https://amaniafrica-et.org/africa-at-a-crossroads-pan-africanism-the-breakdown-of-global-order-and-the-future-of-collective-security/>

2 The imperative for and outline of a new paradigm for Africa's International relations in a fundamentally changing global order, Amani Africa Policy Brief (July 2025) available on <https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Imperative-for-and-Outline-of-a-New-Paradigm-for-Africas-International-Relations-in-a-Fundamentally-Changing-Global-Order.pdf>

3 Solomon A. Dersso, The quest for Pax Africana: The case of the African Union Peace and Security Regime, African Journal of Conflict Resolution (2012) vol. 2.

While the idea for the review of the APSA has its genesis in the AU institutional reform that started a decade ago, it acquired particular significance during the past few years as the APSA faces a growing crises of delivery. The global disorder added further impetus for the need for updating the APSA and repositioning the AU to the new era of peace and security and global geopolitics.

However, for these initiatives to turn the tide and restore the agency of the AU, it is of paramount significance that they are premised on accurate diagnosis of what is ailing the AU and its peace and security engagement on the continent and the formulation of concrete actionable measures informed by both AU's relatively more successful previous experiences adapted to the changing dynamics of today's peace and security landscape. To this end, an expert panel, on which this special report draws, was convened in Nairobi over two days on 13-14 July 2026 bringing together seasoned policy practitioners, experts, researchers and current and former AU officials.⁸

This special report, which presents synthesis of the rich exchanges from the expert panel, is organised in five sections followed by a consolidated set of recommendations. Section one examines what would make APSA more effective in practice, drawing on the dialogue's diagnosis of the AU's implementation deficit and the low-cost measures available to address it. Section two situates this diagnosis within the broader shift in the global order and what it implies for African peace and security. Section

three draws strategic lessons from a comparative reading of contemporary and historical African conflicts. Section four turns to the implications of these findings for the ongoing APSA review. Section five examines a set of emerging strategic frontiers- critical minerals, artificial intelligence, data sovereignty and digital governance- that the dialogue argued can no longer be treated as separate from the continent's core peace and security agenda. The special report then concludes with setting out its conclusion and recommendations.



II. THE AU AND ITS APSA IN A CHANGING CONTINENTAL LANDSCAPE AND GLOBAL ORDER

The promotion of peace and security is at the core of the very *raison d'être* of the AU. The Constitutive Act of the AU in its Preamble stipulates that the AU is founded 'conscious of the fact that the scourge of conflicts in Africa constitutes a major impediment to the socio-economic development of the continent.'

This precipitated the establishment of the APSA under the Protocol to the Constitutive Act Establishing the Peace and Security Council (PSC).⁹ Going beyond

⁸ See <https://amani-africa-et.org/the-quest-for-restoring-aus-agency-in-peace-and-security-expert-policy-dialogue-on-the-review-and-revitalisation-of-the-apsa/>

⁹ Amani Africa, *The African Union Peace and Security Council Handbook 2024 (2024)* (PSC Handbook) available on <https://amani-africa-et.org/>

the ambition set for the UN of ‘saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war’, the AU’s Agenda 2063 committed the AU to ‘not to bequeath the burden of conflict to the next generation of Africans’ and ‘to achieve the goal of a conflict free Africa, to make peace a reality for all our people and to rid the continent of wars, civil conflicts, human rights violations, humanitarian disasters and violent conflicts and to prevent genocide.’ In 2020, African states decided to extend the timeline to 2030.

Instead of the guns going silent, the first ten-year period and the time since 2020 show that the guns are getting louder than at the time when African leaders made the pledge for silencing the guns in 2013. The change of leadership both at the level of member states and most of all the AU Commission, particularly following the election of Moussa Faki Mahamat, was not accompanied by the institutionalization of the vision, political commitment and institutional practice of the first decade of the APSA. As a result, this period has come to show a growing gap between the AU’s peace and security ambition as encapsulated in the APSA and the peace and security realities of the continent.

According to Amani Africa’s 2026 signature publication reviewing AU’s role in peace and security, ‘it is as if the dire peace and security situation on the continent moved from the pan to the fire. Conflicts are mutating. Insecurity is deepening. In many instances, violence is unleashed indiscriminately and with impunity.’¹⁰ There is a shift in the nature of conflicts with the proliferation of conflicts involving terrorism and asymmetric

[org/the-african-union-peace-and-security-council-handbook-2024/](https://amani-africa.org/the-african-union-peace-and-security-council-handbook-2024/)

¹⁰ African Union *Floating Adrift*, note 5 above.

warfare and growing entanglement of external actors in African conflicts. While the changes in the conflict dynamics is notable, what also accounts for the increase in the roaring of guns is the lack of adaptation of the APSA to these changing dynamics. Thus, the same publication pointed out that ‘instead of acting with the understanding that the AU and its PSC’s functioning in such moments is ‘a strategic (and even existential) imperative for Africa’, the continental body and its decision-making structures are absent in mobilizing meaningful collective action. Their decisions tend to be more performative than (strategic and) consequential.’¹¹ The result, as captured in the title of that publication, is the AU that is **floating adrift** as a new era of insecurity entrenches on the continent.

Additionally, and as noted above, the review of the APSA is taking place at a moment when the international environment that shaped its creation has fundamentally changed. APSA emerged during a period characterised by relative optimism about multilateral cooperation, expanding international norms, and broad consensus around collective approaches to peace and security. As such the APSA reflected and is premised on assumptions that regional organisations would increasingly operate within a supportive international order anchored in commitment to the UN Charter, the rules of international law and multilateral cooperation.

The expert panel questioned whether those assumptions remain valid. Today, geopolitical tensions are deepening. International law, already undermined by deep pre-existing design and operational flaws, has been hollowed out of any

¹¹ As above.

semblance of its relevance in governing international relations and the conduct of states. Breaches of international law, including violations of IHL and the Geneva Conventions, are carried out with impunity.¹²

The expert pane thus argued that the challenge facing the AU today is not simply whether APSA requires reform, but whether its underlying strategic logic remains adequate in an international system undergoing profound transformation. Rather than treating the APSA review as a technical exercise for institutional tweaking, the expert panel situated it within a broader reconfiguration of global power, arguing that restoring the AU's effectiveness ultimately requires restoring Africa's strategic agency in an increasingly fragmented and competitive world order.

III. THE AU AND ITS APSA IN A CHANGING CONTINENTAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXT

3.1. Restoring AU Agency in peace and security

It was the assessment of the expert panel that the Union's principal challenge is not the inadequacy of APSA's institutional architecture or legal framework. Rather, it is the gradual erosion of the AU's political agency, the capacity to exercise leadership, shape political processes, mobilise collective action and translate existing

continental norms into meaningful operational actions. The APSA review therefore presents an opportunity not to redesign APSA, but to expand the strategic purpose, restore the political confidence and implementation culture necessary for the Union to exercise leadership in Africa's peace and security landscape.

3.1.1. The deficit is one of implementation, not of normative or institutional lacuna

The most extensively developed and least contested assessment is that APSA's normative and institutional architecture has reached a level of institutional maturity that makes further proliferation of norms and structures or review of existing ones unnecessary. Over the past two decades, the Union has demonstrated remarkable normative entrepreneurship, producing an extensive body of legal and policy instruments.¹³

With respect to peace and security, the challenge has been ensuring that existing commitments and policy and normative instruments consistently shape political practice and policy action and guide the articulation of strategies for responding to emerging issues. Rather than continually producing new instruments, participants argued that the APSA review should prioritise strengthening implementation systems, reinforcing political ownership and improving institutional coordination.¹⁴

The expert panel identified a structural imbalance between the considerable

¹² 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions: Preserving our common humanity in a time of major crises of compliance, Amani Africa Policy Brief (April 2025) 4 available on https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/75th-Anniversary-of-the-Geneva-Conventions_Policy-Brief.pdf

¹³ See PSC Handbook, note 8 above.

¹⁴ Amani Africa, AU's Review of the African Peace and Security Architecture Should Focus on the implementation deficit, Policy Brief (May 2026) <https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/AUs-Review-of-the-African-Peace-and-Security-Architecture-should-focus-on-implementation-deficit.pdf>

political and intellectual investment devoted to producing continental norms and the comparatively limited investment made in developing implementation systems. Over the years, the AU has become increasingly proficient at negotiating frameworks, adopting communiqués and articulating continental positions. Yet, these achievements have not been matched by comparable investment in creating institutional processes capable of translating policy decisions into operational realities.

This imbalance is reflected in the work of the PSC itself. Although the Council adopted hundreds of decisions, communiqués and press statements addressing conflicts across the continent, relatively few are accompanied by clearly defined implementation plans, timelines, monitoring mechanisms and accountability frameworks. Decisions frequently identify what should be done without specifying who is responsible, how implementation should be financed or how progress will be assessed. Advancing effectiveness of the APSA through implementation thus requires addressing these gaps in decision-making.¹⁵

The expert panel further pointed out that many AU decisions are negotiated primarily to accommodate diverse political interests. This is not necessarily a problem on its own. The focus on such accommodation is done without due regard to implementation. Consequently, among others, implementation responsibility is defined without precision,

creating an accountability vacuum in which implementation failures rarely produce institutional consequences.

Even when decisions are precise and responsibility for implementation are clear, the Commission has adopted what may be considered to be an *ala carte* approach to implementation, acting on those it chooses to implement, while ignoring others. A review of PSC decisions on the war in Sudan illustrate these conditions. The PSC decision on Sudan 'to identify all external actors supporting the parties to the armed conflict militarily, financially and politically and make proposal on how to contain them' was made during the June 2024 PSC summit but remains pending more than two years after it was adopted and repeatedly reiterated. The resulting institutional culture has gradually normalised non-implementation.

Despite repeated commitments to preventive diplomacy, mediation, constitutional governance and early warning, implementation continues to depend largely on political convenience and opportunism rather than institutional obligation and the sustained mobilization of collective leadership and political support. The expert panel therefore argued that the APSA review should devote considerably greater attention to implementation architecture, including clearer assignment of responsibilities, stronger monitoring mechanisms and institutional accountability, than to developing additional normative frameworks.

3.1.2. The commission's power of initiative

It is not uncommon to blame the AU's ineffectiveness on its primarily inter-governmental identity and the lack of

¹⁵ See also Solomon A Dersso, *Beyond Communiqués: Charting the path for Making the PSC fit for purpose*, Ideas Indaba (30 March 2026) <https://amani africa-et.org/beyond-communiques-charting-the-path-for-making-the-psc-fit-to-restore-aus-agency-in-peace-security/>

adequate transfer of sovereign authority from member states to the continental body.¹⁶ For example, former AU Commission Chairperson was of the view that the Commission and its Chairperson lack the requisite power for action. He in particular stated that the Commission is 'deprived of sufficient of maneuver to act urgently on strategic questions.'¹⁷

The expert meeting pointed out that the loss of agency by the AU in peace and security is not a product of a change in the power structure of the AU. Let alone to make a convincing case for the surrendering of further sovereign power from states in favor of AU, the AU did not establish that it has fully and meaningfully utilized all the authority vested in it under existing AU instruments. It is not the lack of power that undermined effective AU role in Sudan. No additional power would enable the AU to assume leadership in mediation or peacemaking in the DRC. It is not either because of lack of power that the AU left its political mission in Mali and the Sahel (MISAHL) without leadership for a prolonged period of time, thereby undermining itself in the Sahel. These are not issues to be fixed by more power but by the effective use of existing authority with a sense of responsibility and diplomatic acumen.

Central to restoring AU agency is the revitalisation of what participants described as the Commission's 'power of

¹⁶ See Ueli Staeger & Babatunde Fagbayibo, *The African Union is weak because its member want it that way*, *The Conversation* (5 March 2024) <https://theconversation.com/the-african-union-is-weak-because-its-members-want-it-that-way-experts-call-for-action-on-its-powers-224191>

¹⁷ Faki Mahamat, *Address to the opening session of the AU Assembly* (February 2022) https://au.int/sites/default/files/speeches/43527-sp-CP_Speech_AHG_17Feb24_en.pdf

initiative'. While Member States remain the ultimate political authority within the Union, the Constitutive Act and the PSC Protocol provide the Commission with considerable scope to initiate political action, place issues before the PSC, mobilise continental institutions and generate political momentum. Past experience demonstrates that the Commission has successfully exercised this initiative. The Commission's role in establishing the AU High-Level Implementation Panel on Sudan, the precedent setting Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan and several mediation initiatives illustrate the enormous space the Commission has for catalyzing collective action.

It was pointed out during the expert panel that that this authority has become increasingly underutilised. Instead of exercising this power of initiative, the Commission has tended to be not only reactively performative in its approach but also surrendered its power of initiative by being too deferential to Member State direction. Unlike how the AU operated during the first decade and half, the AU Commission tended to look to member states for them to mobilise themselves for collective action, instead of leveraging the commitment they made under the Constitutive Act and the PSC Protocol for catalysing their support and building common ground between them for collective action. This has contributed to slower responses, reduced political visibility and diminished continental leadership.

The Chairperson already has the authority to place issues before the PSC, convene relevant AU organs, and mobilise expertise across the wider African governance ecosystem. The Commission is also

responsible for developing politically untainted and factually grounded analysis and strategy for conflict prevention and resolution. However, it needs to maintain sustained and trusted channel of communication with member states for mobilizing buy in for proposed policy action for conflict prevention or resolution.

The discussion highlighted several practical illustrations of this approach. In Sudan, the Commission could convene existing AU human rights institutions into an African-led monitoring mechanism while institutionalising regular humanitarian briefings to the PSC. In the Sahel, the Commission could convene regular coordination meetings among the region's overlapping security initiatives to reduce duplication and strengthen political dialogue. More broadly, the AU could expand its role in economic diplomacy by adapting the pooled procurement model successfully employed during the COVID-19 pandemic to strategic commodities such as fertilisers, fuel and pharmaceuticals. These initiatives require political imagination more than significant new power being invested in the AU.

3.1.3. Instead of money, peace diplomacy through articulation of strategy and mobilization of continental support for such strategy, is the decisive constraint

Another point of focus in the discussion was on the importance that should be attached to financial resources. It was pointed out that while financing is not irrelevant, its role is being frequently overstated. The expert panel argued that financing is not the most decisive constraint for APSA's effectiveness. It is true that there has been heavy policy discourse around funding of AU's peace and security during the past decade.

However, it is worth pointing out that this focus on funding is largely a product of the increased reliance on and directed principally towards peace support operations, which generally tend to be resource intensive.¹⁸

It emerged from the various case studies presented during the expert panel that **the success of preventive diplomacy or peacemaking is first and foremost a function of technical, political and diplomatic factors**. These factors of success for conflict prevention and resolution include, a) the credibility of the diagnosis of the crisis, b) the quality of the political strategy anchoring the initiative, c) the stature and credibility of the mechanism put in place for implementing such strategy and d) the depth of the continental consensus and support. No amount of funds would buy and can be a substitute for these critical factors. By contrast, the existence of these technical, political and diplomatic factors can catalyze the mobilization of funds for preventive diplomacy or peacemaking.

Racognising the need for expanding reliance on internal sources of financing, the expert panel noted that the gradual withdrawal of European financing following the shift from the African Peace Facility to the European Peace Facility, redirected toward other priorities, and the still-unimplemented UN Security Council Resolution 2719 framework for AU-led peace operations, are evidence that a funding model built on heavy external reliance is neither sustainable nor a sound

¹⁸ See AU, *Consensus Paper on Predictable, Adequate, and Sustainable Financing for African Union Peace and Security Activities*, available on <https://papsrepository.africanunion.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/b3d6be2c-1d5b-46c4-826f-02209f8fb484/content>

basis for setting institutional priorities.

In view of the fundamental shifts taking place in the world, the expert panel made two observations. First, the trends of external financing indicate that the AU needs to priorities conflict prevention and resolution tools that are less resource intensive than peace support operations around which much of these external funding arrangements have been organized. Second, if the AU Commission wins the trust of member states and presents credible strategies while enabling member states find common ground for supporting such strategy, there would be greater willingness for supporting the funding of AU conflict prevention and resolution efforts.

3.1.4. Leadership, Accountability and Institutional Culture

The expert panel highlighted that the crisis confronting the AU is not simply technical; it is fundamentally political. Restoring the AU's agency therefore requires a deliberate shift from a culture of procedural management toward one of political entrepreneurship. The discussion across case studies emphasised that AU's influence is a function of the exercise by AU actors, particularly the Commission, of the policy thinking, the coalition building and political initiative leadership. This is more so the case in times when member states tend to be inward looking and not adequately committed at a pan-African scale.

It was also pointed out that the success factors for AU's conflict prevention and resolution depend on diplomatic imagination, technical competence, political courage and sustained will and hard work for achieving results. All of these depend on the exercise of responsible

leadership on the part of key AU actors.

The expert panel also underscored that restoring AU's credibility requires confronting the accountability deficit that has become embedded within AU. Effective implementation depends on identifying clear institutional responsibilities, establishing measurable benchmarks and ensuring that implementation failures carry consequences. Without a stronger culture of accountability, the gap between continental commitments and political practice will continue to widen, regardless of how sophisticated APSA's normative architecture becomes.

This transformation also requires **shift in institutional culture and mind set.**

It is of paramount importance that the policy-making bureaucracy of the AU demonstrates fidelity to and anchors its initiatives on AU norms and policies both for consistency and enhancing compliance. Breaking from tendencies in which AU offices are at times seen as personal possessions rather than institutional responsibility (and taking action depends on the personal whim of office holders), the bureaucracy should be imbued with international civil service qualities of high-level technical competence and strategic and operational impartiality and professionalism. Not any less important area serious sense of responsibility and urgency in how it tracks, detects and mobilizes response to conflicts. As the machinery that anchors and catalyses peace and security decision-making, the importance of enhancing these attributes of the AU bureaucracy cannot be overemphasized.

3.1.5. Advancing peace diplomacy through reclaiming the primacy of politics

As far as the AU is concerned, it demands a departure in the institutional cultural disposition of the AU Commission. Participants expressed concern that the Commission has, over time, become increasingly reluctant to exercise the political authority available to it under the Constitutive Act and the PSC Protocol. Instead, it has often tended to operate as a 'secretariat' and deferring to Member States, even in situations where proactive leadership is required of the Commission under relevant AU policy and normative instruments and could strengthen continental responses.

The other major conclusion of the panel was that APSA's effectiveness depends fundamentally on restoring the primacy of politics. Over time, continental peace and security responses have increasingly become associated with peace support operations, military deployments backed by external financing. From its earliest peace operations in Darfur and Somalia to subsequent missions in Mali and the Central African Republic, the Union increasingly came to associate relevance with its ability to deploy troops. These deployments elevated the visibility of AU's peace and security role. Inadvertently, they also created a dynamic that prioritized deployment as the most prized and default policy instrument.

This trend has distorted perceptions of the AU's comparative advantage. Yet, the expert panel and the case studies illustrated that this orientation encouraged an unsustainable dependence on external financing while diverting attention from the areas where the AU possesses unique comparative

advantages: preventive diplomacy, mediation, political accompaniment and continental legitimacy. Additionally, the gradual termination of the African Peace Facility, uncertainty surrounding implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2719, and shifting geopolitical priorities all demonstrate the limitations of a peace and security strategy centred primarily on externally financed military deployments.

It was pointed out that unlike the United Nations (UN), the AU is unlikely to ever possess the financial, logistical and institutional capacity to sustain large multidimensional peacekeeping operations independently. While it enjoys a mandate for deploying peace support operations, this was never intended to be a principal and most dominant tool for advancing peace. In any case, such role of the AU was advanced as a gap filling measure, to deal with situations in which UN deployments are lacking. Most importantly, such deployments were never intended to take the place of but to facilitate and follow political strategy and solutions.

Rather than attempting to replicate the UN model, it was argued that APSA should deliberately refocus on those areas where the Union enjoys both comparative legitimacy and comparative effectiveness. **Early political engagement, preventive diplomacy, mediation support, facilitation of dialogue, and sustained accompaniment of political processes remain areas in which the AU can exercise leadership that external actors cannot easily replicate.**¹⁹

¹⁹ Amani Africa, *Revitalizing African Union's Role in Peace and Security: Insights and Lessons from AU's Ad Hoc Mechanisms for Peace*, Special Research Report (August 2026) (*Revitalizing African*

This shift also requires moving beyond episodic crisis diplomacy toward continuous political engagement. Prevention should no longer be understood as the first phase of crisis response but rather as a permanent political function embedded within governance, democratic accountability, constitutionalism and regional integration.

Past experiences demonstrate both the AU's potential and its limitations. In Kenya's 2007–08 electoral crises, the AU provided legitimacy while the UN offered operational support, resulting in a successful mediation. In Sudan and South Sudan, the AU HighLevel Implementation Panel (AUHIP) showed the value of community engagement in coming with proper diagnosis of the problem and structured methodology. In the Central African Republic, AU Commission anchoring, regional buyin and civil society involvement, strengthened legitimacy. These cases reveal that the AU's comparative advantage lies in preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, mediation, legitimacy, and convening power.

These examples from the past interventions of the AU can be used as a basis for a deliberate reorientation of AU peace and security engagement away from large-scale peacekeeping and toward preventive diplomacy, mediation and political accompaniment, where the Union's comparative advantage is genuine, and the cost is a fraction of deploying troops. It also supplies the standard against which further resourcing should be judged: any proposed increase, including the replenishment of the Peace

Union's Role) available on <https://amani-africa-et.org/revitalising-african-unions-role-in-peace-and-security-in-africa-insights-and-lessons-from-aus-ad-hoc-mechanisms-for-peace/>

Fund from \$400 million to \$1 billion, needs a disciplined value proposition attached to it, specifying what additional capability the money buys, rather than treating the sum itself as the measure of institutional seriousness.

3.2. Making APSA fit for a new era

3.2.1. APSA was designed for a different strategic environment, needs to be repositioned to a fragmenting global order

The post-Cold War unipolar period was characterised by expanding multilateralism, growing confidence in international institutions and widespread belief that collective security frameworks could progressively replace unilateral responses to conflict. This was also a time when Africa was 'left to fend for itself', in the words of Kofi Annan. African institutional reforms unfolded alongside such broader international environment, which simultaneously encouraged and pushed the AU to construct one of the world's most ambitious regional peace and security architectures. As the relevant parts of the PSC Protocol on cooperation with the UN clearly indicate, Africa's conflict management system was designed as part of a cooperative international security framework.

Today, however, many of those assumptions no longer hold. Not only that the multilateral system is 'rapturing',²⁰ and, as the publication the *African Union Floating Adrift* referred to above pointed

²⁰ Mark carney, Prime Minister of Canda, Principled and pragmatic: Canada's path, addressed delivered at the World Economic Forum on 26 January 2026 available on <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/speeches/2026/01/20/principled-and-pragmatic-canadas-path-prime-minister-carney-addresses>

out, in its place ‘mere anarchy is loosed upon the world’. The international system is increasingly defined by geopolitical rivalry, weakened adherence to international law, declining confidence in multilateral institutions and the growing tendency of major powers to pursue their objectives on the basis of transactional, unilateralist and coercive ways.

For the AU, these developments carry profound implications. The cooperative international environment supportive of AU’s increased assumption of responsibility in peace and security is less readily available. As opposed to the context in which the APSA was designed and rolled out, today the Union operates within an environment that fragment rather than reinforce African-led collective processes. The view that AU’s role in the maintenance of international peace and security in Africa is a global public good is no longer as widely held.

As poignantly pointed out, for Africa, which was on the receiving end of global geopolitical rivalry most recently during the Cold War, the current state of the global order is raising the specter of the repeat of turning the continent into a mere object of major power competition. This undermines Africa’s agency in advancing peace and security collectively through the AU, as events in various parts of the continent such as the Sahel and Horn of Africa illustrate. As a result, **‘Africa is entering a period in which it is more exposed to instability while simultaneously losing the external mechanisms that had so far contributed to manage instability.’**²¹

21 El-Ghassim Wane, *Africa at a Crossroads: Pan-Africanism, Global Disorder and Collective Security*, Ideas Indaba (27 February 2026) available on <https://amani-africa-et.org/africa-at-a->

The expert meeting affirmed that the APSA review cannot as such be limited to marginal institutional tweaks. It must also reconsider how the AU exercises leadership within an international environment where multilateral cooperation and support can no longer be assumed. First, this makes **more self-reliance and deeper integration a strategic imperative rather than a matter of choice**. Second, it demands a more proactive and cooperative continental dynamic and integrative institutional processes. The reposition of the AU for exercising leadership in a changing and multipolar world system also necessitates the **prioritization of peace and security diplomacy** with its premium on both the mobilization of wide support and consensus and the elaboration and pursuit of a solid political strategy for conflict prevention and resolution.

3.2.2. Repositioning APSA beyond conflict management

The other implication of the changing international order concerns APSA’s strategic purpose. The expert panel argued that peace and security can no longer be understood solely through the traditional lens of conflict management. Instead, APSA must increasingly be viewed as part of a broader continental strategy for protecting African interests in an era of intensified geopolitical competition.

This reflects the growing interdependence between peace and security, economic resilience, regional integration and diplomatic influence. Contemporary security risks increasingly emerge through disruptions to trade, competition over strategic resources, technological dependence, migration

[crossroads-pan-africanism-global-disorder-and-collective-security/](https://amani-africa-et.org/africa-at-a-crossroads-pan-africanism-global-disorder-and-collective-security/)

pressures, maritime insecurity and foreign military deployment rather than through conventional armed conflicts.

It emerged in the expert meeting that APSA should become more closely integrated with other pillars of the AU's integration and development agenda. Strengthening regional integration, protecting strategic supply chains, promoting economic sovereignty and advancing continental infrastructure all contribute directly to conflict prevention by reducing structural vulnerabilities that make Africa amenable to external manipulation.

This repositioning also requires the expansion of the threat assessment to go beyond inter-state and intra-state conflicts to include threats arising from external intervention and Cold War like rivalry and those involving new domains such as cyber and artificial intelligence.

This broader conception of APSA also requires stronger coordination across the AU system. Peace and security institutions should increasingly work alongside and draw on the contribution of the wider AU economic, development, health, infrastructure and humanitarian bodies in pursuit of the prevention and resolution of conflicts as well as advancement of post-conflict stability and development. The dialogue highlighted the importance of making fuller use of existing AU institutions, including the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Peer Review Mechanism, specialised technical agencies and the AU's economic policy structures, as part of an integrated continental approach to advancing peace and stability.

3.2.3. From multilateral dependence to strategic agency through institutional reorientation

The weakening of the multilateral system does not diminish the importance of the AU. Rather, it increases it. Participants of the expert panel argued that the erosion of effective global governance creates an even greater imperative for continental leadership. As external actors become more divided and international institutions less capable of coordinated action, the AU must increasingly become the principal political platform through which African states exercise collective influence.

The imperative for the AU to achieve a firm strategic agency in a changing global context requires a shift in the institutional culture of the AUC from that of a 'secretariat' to a full assertion of its role as a Commission duly empowered by AU normative instruments and capable of shaping continental agendas, generating diplomatic initiatives and catalyzing the development of common African positions. Restoring African agency therefore requires a renewed understanding of the Commission's role.

There are commitments of various depth that AU member states made under AU policies, normative instruments and decisions across the various areas of the mandate of the AU. Rather than operating simply as facilitator of the initiatives of AU member states, the Commission must actively generate political momentum, identify emerging strategic challenges, convene relevant actors and create opportunities for collective action that catalyze implementation of the commitments of AU member states.

In the realm of peace and security, previous experience demonstrates that

the Commission has exercised such initiative successfully in the past, including through proactive mediation efforts and the establishment of high-level political mechanisms that subsequently secured Member State support.²²

The discussions also stressed that political will should not be understood as a fixed resource that either exists or does not exist. Political will is often generated through leadership, persuasion and sustained diplomatic engagement. As the experience of Salim Ahmed Salim's role for repositioning the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the changing realities of a post-Cold War world order illustrated,²³ the leadership required from states for advancing collective action can also be similarly harnessed through, among others, proactive initiative and targeted engagement rather than making statements or sending of note verbale. The Commission's comparative advantage lies precisely in its capacity to a) identify areas where a critical mass of Member States can be mobilised around common interests, even where unanimous agreement remains elusive, and b) actively and persistently engage member states both through their representatives in Addis Ababa and directly in capitals.

A historical counterpoint reinforces this argument. The record of the OAU, often dismissed as merely a forum of sovereign states with little independent agency, in fact demonstrated meaningful political

²² See *Revitalizing African Union's role*, note 18 above.

²³ Said Djinnit, Ibrahim Assane Mayaki and El-Ghassim Wane, *Africa at a turning point: Navigating Peril and Seizing opportunity in a Changing Global Order*, Ideas Indaba (26 June 2025) available on <https://amani-africa-et.org/africa-at-a-turning-point-navigating-peril-and-seizing-opportunity-in-a-changing-global-order/>

initiative, including its role in bringing an early continental territorial dispute to the negotiating table and in building the consensus around respect for colonial borders inherited at independence that prevented a wave of newly independent states' border disputes from escalating further in the early 1960s. The implication of this for the present moment is instructive. The erosion of multilateral consensus is real and consequential, but it is not a wholly novel condition that Africa has never had to navigate.

The continental organisation's own history both during and in the aftermath of the Cold War suggests that decisive agency has always depended less on a favourable international environment than the internal factors for collective action. It required strategic and proactive thought leadership, a diplomatic statecraft that mobilizes consensus and support of member states, and the commitment of leaders for collective action.

The expert panel further noted that the institutional reorientation that the changing global context necessitates further demands eschewing the apparent fragmentation and pursuit of unilateral and rival policies among African states. As pointed out in one policy brief, 'rather than projecting a coherent continental strategy, African states have adopted diverse regional and national postures, often at odds with each other. This lack of coordination undermines Africa's potential leverage in international affairs and exposes the continent to strategic manipulation by external powers.'²⁴

²⁴ Amani Africa, *The Imperative for and Outline of a New Paradigm for Africa's International Relations in a Fundamentally Changing Global Order*, Policy Brief (July 2025) available on <https://amani-africa-et.org/wp-content/uploads/The->

Addressing this structural flaw and shifting away from bilateral opportunism and towards institutionalised collective engagement is a *sine qua non* to forestalling fragmentation and achieving collective agency.

3.2.4. Towards a more cohesive African voice through a common foreign policy

A very pertinent message that emerged from the expert panel was that Africa's response to the changing global order should not be defensive but strategic. Participants repeatedly argued that the AU must become more confident in articulating and defending African positions on issues that directly affect the continent's interests.

The dialogue similarly highlighted the importance of strengthening Africa's role within evolving global governance institutions. Membership of the G20, ongoing debates concerning reform of the UN Security Council and wider discussions on the future of multilateral governance provide opportunities for the AU to exercise greater international influence. Yet such influence depends on the Union speaking with greater strategic clarity and demonstrating that it can effectively coordinate collective African positions on issues extending well beyond traditional peace and security.

The foregoing demands entail moving beyond **reactive diplomacy** towards a more **proactive common foreign policy orientation**. While recognising the diversity of Member States' external partnerships, the panel suggested that complete unity is neither realistic nor necessary. Instead, **the AU should seek** [*Imperative-for-and-Outline-of-a-New-Paradigm-for-Africas-International-Relations-in-a-Fundamentally-Changing-Global-Order.pdf*](#) (New paradigm for Africa's international relations)

to identify both a) a set of minimum strategic interests around which collective positions can consistently be developed²⁵ and b) principles that guide such common foreign policy action.

Such an approach would enable the Union to respond more effectively to emerging geopolitical developments, including disruptions to global supply chains, changes in international trade regimes, reforms of multilateral institutions and growing competition among external powers for influence in Africa. It would also reinforce the AU's ability to provide political cover for Member States by articulating positions that individual governments may find difficult to advance independently.

The AU needs to proactively repurpose its role as a platform for projecting Africa's collective voice in the global arena to make it fit for producing unified messaging on emerging global issues of concern, developing coherent policy papers/strategies on Africa's relations with various major and middle powers and leveraging some of the relevant AU structures into consolidated negotiating platforms. This would address the prevailing asymmetry in which global powers such as China engage the continent based on coordinated Africa strategies and approach the continent with clear geopolitical intent while Africa lacks a comparable collective framework and tends to priorities individual deal making.

²⁵ See Solomon A. Dersso, Kenya's President Ruto Proposes an African Foreign Policy for Repositioning Africa at the 39th AU Assembly, Ideas Indaba (14 February 2026) available on <https://amaniafrica-et.org/kenyas-president-ruto-proposes-an-african-foreign-policy-for-repositioning-africa-atthe-39th-au-assembly/>

IV. REPOSITIONING AU AND APSA TO NEW STRATEGIC FRONTIERS

The strategic environment confronting Africa has fundamentally changed. Increasingly, the continent's peace and security is being shaped by competition over critical resources, technological transformation, maritime spaces and geopolitical rivalry. These issues are no longer peripheral to APSA's mandate; they are becoming central determinants of Africa's security landscape. The dialogue therefore called for a broader conception of peace and security that moves beyond responding to armed conflict towards anticipating the structural forces that increasingly shape conflict dynamics and African agency. APSA must evolve from an architecture primarily designed to manage crises and conflicts in the conventional sense into one capable of strengthening Africa's strategic resilience in an era of profound geopolitical and technological transformation.

4.1. Economic sovereignty as the foundation of strategic agency

A critical aspect of the new strategic frontiers necessitates economic sovereignty as an indispensable pillar of continental peace and security. Participants argued that **Africa's ability to exercise political agency increasingly depends on reducing structural dependencies that leave the continent vulnerable to external political and economic pressures.** Peace and security can therefore no longer be separated from questions of industrial capacity, supply-chain resilience and economic transformation.

Critical minerals illustrate this challenge

most clearly. As global demand for minerals essential to the energy transition and digital economy accelerates, Africa has become an increasingly important arena of geopolitical competition. Participants observed that competition among external powers for access to strategic minerals has already become intertwined with conflict dynamics in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while extractive political economies continue to undermine governance, fuel violence and weaken collective bargaining. Unless managed strategically, the growing global demand for Africa's mineral wealth risks reproducing familiar patterns in which geopolitical competition reinforces instability and extractivism rather than supporting sustainable development.²⁶

A major recommendation that is seen as critical to economic sovereignty is the establishment of a **continental natural resources for development authority**. This will be a body that helps to develop common minimum standards, serve as a platform for bargaining the terms and conditions of mining of resources on the continent and shape the price and marketing of those resources and their linkages with industrial beneficiation.

The discussion emphasised that this challenge extends beyond resource governance alone. Africa's continued dependence on external supply chains for essential goods, including food, fertiliser, pharmaceuticals and fuel, was identified as a structural vulnerability repeatedly exposed during global crises as the Ukraine and Iran wars showed. To this end, participants suggested that the AU Commission should reinforce its convening role by bringing together

²⁶ See *New Paradigm for Africa's International Relations*, note 20 Above.

governments, development finance institutions and the private sector as well as technical capacities from academia and think tanks to identify opportunities for supporting the expansion of domestic manufacturing and regional production capacity.

4.2. Emerging domains of strategic competition

The dialogue further highlighted that geopolitical competition is increasingly extending into domains that have traditionally received limited attention within continental peace and security discussions. **Maritime security** emerged as one such frontier. Participants observed that growing external military and commercial competition across and expanding control of Africa's maritime spaces is reshaping the continent's strategic environment, with implications extending well beyond piracy or maritime crime. **Control of strategic sea routes, access to ports and maritime infrastructure, and the protection of underwater resources are becoming central to both economic security, supply chain resilience and geopolitical influence.**

Related concerns were raised regarding the proliferation of foreign military bases across the continent and the potential implications of nuclear proliferation. Rather than treating these as isolated security issues, participants viewed them as manifestations of a broader challenge: preserving African agency in an increasingly competitive international environment. In each case, the central question is whether the AU is able to articulate coherent continental positions before external actors define the strategic parameters within which Africa is

compelled to operate.

4.3. Technology, artificial intelligence and digital sovereignty

Technological transformation was identified as perhaps the fastest-moving strategic frontier confronting Africa's development and the APSA. Artificial intelligence, digital technologies and data governance are already reshaping the conduct of conflict, political competition and statecraft. Participants observed that AI-enabled disinformation, cyber operations, surveillance technologies and autonomous weapons systems are no longer hypothetical future risks but emerging realities that increasingly influence political stability across the continent.

The dialogue therefore argued that APSA's analytical frameworks and early warning systems must evolve accordingly. Artificial intelligence and digital technologies should no longer be treated as specialised policy issues addressed elsewhere within the AU system but should be integrated directly into continental conflict analysis, preventive diplomacy and strategic foresight.

More broadly, participants argued that digital sovereignty has become inseparable from political sovereignty. Dependence on external digital infrastructure, cloud services and data ecosystems creates new forms of strategic vulnerability that require much closer attention from the Union's peace and security institutions. The implication of this for the AU goes beyond and above the current reactive policy engagement and demands the exploration of supporting and promoting a **pan-African digital infrastructure,**

technical expertise, AI ecosystem and regulatory capacity.



V. CONCLUSION

Conflicts are at a historic high, not just in Africa but globally.²⁷ Africa finds itself in a new era of conflicts and insecurity. At the same time, the multilateral system is in a historic and deep crisis, characterized by serious breaches of international law and the resurgence of unilateralism and increasing reliance on coercive instruments, including force. Both the peace and security landscape on the continent and the depth of the crises afflicting the multilateral system pose existential challenge to the AU and its peace and security order.

With the reversal of some of the gains registered under the APSA as a result of the foregoing developments, the expert panel noted that it has become clear that the AU's engagement in peace and security cannot continue on the trajectory that emerged during the past decade. The expert panel deemed that the review of the APSA, as part of the institutional reform of the AU, offers a unique opportunity for the AU to break from the current trend and

²⁷ ICRC reports that there are more than 130 conflicts globally and Africa accounts for about 40% of these conflicts.

re-position itself to be fit for arresting the downward spiral and restore its leadership role in conflict prevention and resolution in Africa.

However, the expert panel concluded that the review should be informed by an accurate diagnosis of what is impeding AU's leadership in peace and security and effective implementation of the APSA. In this respect, the consensus is that what is ailing the AU and the APSA are not gaps or weaknesses in the APSA norms and institutions. The APSA norms and institutions remain relevant and if pursued faithfully and implemented resolutely, they can enable the AU to restore its leadership role in peace and security. The success of the APSA review will accordingly depend on whether it unlocks the blockages stifling faithful and effective implementation of the APSA, while repositioning it to the changing peace and security context and global dynamics including those outlined in section iv.

VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE APSA REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The ongoing review of APSA and the Extraordinary Summit on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Luanda provide a rare opportunity not only to assess the institutional performance of APSA but also to draw systematically on the AU's own experience in managing some of the continent's most consequential crises. Rather than treating reform as an abstract institutional exercise, the dialogue argued that the review should be informed by the practical lessons emerging from previous AU engagements. These experiences reveal that there were cases in which

APSA has depended less on the existence of formal structures than on the quality of political leadership, the strategic use of continental legitimacy, the ability to act early, and the capacity to organise international engagement around African priorities.

Taken together, the experiences of Sudan, Kenya, the Central African Republic (CAR) and Libya suggest that APSA does not require a fundamentally new architecture. Instead, it requires a deliberate effort to institutionalise the practices that have previously enabled the AU to exercise effective leadership while addressing the shortcomings that have constrained its performance. In this sense, the APSA review should be understood not as an exercise in institutional redesign but as an opportunity to transform accumulated operational experience into a more adaptive and implementation-oriented continental peace and security system.

6.1. Restoring political agency rather than reinventing institutions and norms

Perhaps the most important lesson emerging from the comparative case studies is that successful AU engagement has consistently been driven by political agency.

The experience of the AU High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) on Sudan demonstrated that the Panel's effectiveness did not derive from the creation of a new institutional mechanism, but from the way in which it exercised political judgement. Rather than accepting externally framed narratives surrounding the Darfur conflict, the Panel deliberately invested time in developing its own definition of the crisis through

extensive consultations with affected communities, religious leaders and local stakeholders. This is instructive for shaping the AU's mediation strategy and enabled the Union to define the political parameters of its engagement.

The case illustrates an important lesson for the APSA review. Effective mediation begins not with funding but with locally grounded political diagnosis. Restoring the AU's agency therefore requires strengthening its capacity to independently analyse conflicts, define political strategies and frame continental responses. As further elaborated in the next sub-section, the AU should do so **proactively and early** to prevent positions from hardening, to set the tone for and shape external engagement and thereby constrain externally initiated competing diplomatic processes. The review should consequently place greater emphasis on strengthening the analytical, institutional and political entrepreneurship capacities of the Commission rather than creating additional institutional mechanisms.

The experiences in Kenya (2008) with Kofi Annan's AU Panel of Eminent personalities and Sudan with AUHIP demonstrate that restoring political agency is not about relying exclusively on the limited internal capacity of the AU Commission. The success of these experiences was not because they relied exclusively on the Commission's internal capacity, but because they, with the Commission's support, deliberately assembled a multidisciplinary team, which in the case of Sudan involved a combination of experienced specialists, constitutional lawyers, political economists and technical experts. Rather than weakening AU Commission ownership, this approach strengthened it by ensuring that external

expertise served an African political strategy rather than defining it.

Throughout the dialogue, participants repeatedly emphasised that the question is therefore not whether the AU should work with external experts, but whether it retains ownership over the political direction of mediation. **Capacity can be borrowed; political judgement cannot.** The APSA review should consequently distinguish more clearly between outsourcing expertise, which is often both necessary and desirable, and outsourcing strategic leadership, which ultimately diminishes African agency.

6.2. Speed as a strategic asset

A second lesson emerging consistently across the case studies concerns the strategic importance of early political engagement. The Sudan (2023), Kenya and Libya experiences demonstrated that the AU was most effective when it moved rapidly to shape political processes before they became crowded out by competing initiatives. In Sudan, participants observed that delays in continental engagement progressively narrowed the AU's political space as external actors established parallel mediation efforts. Once these processes became entrenched, reclaiming African leadership became considerably more difficult.

The Kenyan mediation provides perhaps the clearest illustration of the value of speed. Despite the severity of the post-election violence, the Panel of Eminent African Personalities established a mediation framework within days of its arrival, rapidly agreeing on a negotiating agenda and maintaining continuous engagement until a political settlement was reached only seven weeks later.

Participants noted that the unusual speed of the process was itself one of its defining feature of its success. Early engagement helped prevent the political positions of the parties from hardening irreversibly while limiting opportunities for competing mediation tracks to emerge.

Conversely, the Libyan case demonstrates the costs of delayed action. Despite articulating a roadmap early, the slowness and inability to engage before military dynamics overtook political opportunities meant that the AU entered the process after key strategic decisions had already been taken by others. By the time the High-Level Ad Hoc Committee formally engaged the parties, neither the parties nor the principal external actors considered mediation to be the preferred pathway. Of course, it should be noted that it was more the external decision to achieve regime change through military means rather than the slow pace of AU's engagement that accounted for the failure of AU's mediation in Libya.²⁸

For the APSA review, these experiences underscore that timeliness should be treated as a core institutional capability rather than merely an operational consideration. Strengthening early warning systems will have limited value unless they are matched by political initiatives capable of translating analysis into rapid diplomatic action.

Speed, however, should not be understood simply as acting earlier. The comparative discussion suggested that effective early

²⁸ African union's 2011 peacemaking in Libya: Lessons for the Review of the African Peace and Security Architecture, 14 September 2026, available on <https://amani-africa-et.org/african-unions-2011-peacemaking-in-libya-lessons-for-the-review-of-the-african-peace-and-security-architecture/>

action depends on political strategy and institutional dynamism. Kenya was not resolved quickly because of chance alone; the mediation succeeded because credible political leadership, technical expertise, grassroots engagement and international support were mobilised simultaneously within a coherent political framework. By contrast, Libya illustrates that once political initiative is surrendered to external actors and military dynamics overtake diplomacy, as in Sudan currently, opportunities for mediation narrow rapidly. The review should therefore treat rapid political deployment as an institutional capability requiring institutional dynamism and engaged leadership able and willing to adopt proactive political initiative that leverages both in-house mediation support capacity and pool of specialized expertise to be enlisted externally.

6.3. Comparative advantage lies in peace diplomacy through political legitimacy, not operational capacity

A third lesson concerns the AU's distinctive comparative advantage within increasingly crowded peace process landscape.

Across both the Kenyan and Central African Republic cases, the expert panel observed that the AU contributed relatively little in terms of logistics or financial resources. In Kenya, the UN mobilised mediation specialists, constitutional experts, electoral advisers and operational support, while the AU's institutional presence was remarkably modest. Yet participants were unequivocal that the mediation would almost certainly not have succeeded without it being initiated by and within the AU and in the absence

of the political legitimacy conferred by the AU.

A similar pattern emerged in the Central African Republic. The AU worked closely with ECCAS and the UN, which supplied technical support and logistical resources, while regional actors helped manage the competing interests of external powers. The AU's distinctive contribution lay in providing continental political legitimacy, convening authority and sustained diplomatic engagement.

These experiences challenge assumptions that strengthening APSA necessarily requires investing the AU with additional authority or creating new institutions or changing existing ones. They suggest that the AU's comparative advantage lies elsewhere: in its political legitimacy, its conflict analysis and power of initiative, its normative authority and its ability to mobilise regional consensus. The review should therefore reaffirm **peace diplomacy** covering preventive diplomacy, mediation and political accompaniment as the central pillars of APSA.

Importantly, legitimacy additionally derives from inclusivity. Several participants highlighted the contribution made by civil society organisations, religious leaders and African think tanks in strengthening AU mediation processes. The experience of the Kenya mediation, where continuous engagement with civil society informed the negotiating strategy, and the AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan, which deliberately combined Commission personnel with independent African experts while placing gender and conflict-related sexual violence at the centre of its mandate, illustrate that the AU's legitimacy is strengthened when it systematically incorporates African

societal expertise and experiences into its political processes. Revitalising these partnerships should therefore form part of APSA's preventive diplomacy architecture rather than being treated as ad hoc consultation.

6.4. AU to ensure partnerships must reinforce, not replace, African leadership

The dialogue also produced important insights regarding the role of external partnerships.

One of the dialogue's most consistent conclusions was that the effectiveness of African leadership should not be measured by the absence of international partners but by the AU's ability to organise those partnerships around an African political strategy. The AUHIP demonstrated that international coordination is most effective when the AU defines the political framework within which partners operate. Throughout the Sudan process, the UN, IGAD and the Troika contributed diplomatic leverage, technical expertise and political support while remaining integrated into a mediation architecture directed by the AU. The relationship was therefore complementary rather than competitive.

Libya illustrated the consequences of the opposite dynamic.²⁹ Competing military and diplomatic initiatives, combined with lack of policy alignment between the AU and the UN and between the AU PSC and the three African members of the UN Security Council, progressively reduced the AU's room for manoeuvre.

Yet it was also stressed that Libya should not simply be remembered as

a diplomatic failure. The AU's refusal to endorse military intervention despite intense external pressure represented an important assertion of continental political independence. Although this position did not prevent the collapse of the Libyan state, it demonstrated the importance of preserving the Union's normative credibility even when doing so lacks international support. Subsequent developments in Libya and the consequences thereof in the wider Sahel region vindicated that AU's approach and push for resolving the crisis through mediation was legitimate. Restoring African agency therefore requires strengthening the Commission's capacity not only to coordinate partnerships but also to defend independent African positions where these diverge from prevailing dominant external power preferences.

6.5. Peace diplomacy Beyond mediation and peacemaking: institutionalising long-term political accompaniment

The expert panel underscored that APSA's greatest institutional weakness lies not just in mediation itself but in sustaining political engagement after agreements have been reached. Participants criticised what was described as the 'CNN philosophy' of peace processes, an institutional tendency for attention to dissipate once agreements are signed and international media interest declines, even though implementation is often the most politically fragile phase of conflict resolution. The Central African Republic experience illustrates this challenge vividly. While the AU and ECCAS remain the formal guarantors of the peace agreement, sustained political accompaniment has been limited despite

²⁹ As above.

evidence that countries emerging from conflict remain particularly vulnerable to relapse during the years immediately following settlement. The review should therefore reconceptualise mediation as a state craft and strategic engagement with continuum extending from conflict prevention through negotiation to long-term political accompaniment, with **implementation support treated as an integral component of peace diplomacy** rather than a separate post-conflict activity.

The review should therefore broaden APSA's understanding of peace diplomacy to extend mediation beyond negotiation itself. Effective peace processes require sustained political accompaniment, regular high-level engagement, systematic monitoring of implementation of commitments and stronger integration of post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding into mediation strategies from the outset.

This also requires recognising the contribution of non-state actors. Experiences from both Kenya and the Central African Republic demonstrated the important role played by civil society organisations, religious leaders and community representatives in informing mediation strategies, sustaining public confidence and maintaining dialogue beyond formal political negotiations. Revitalising these channels of engagement should therefore form part of the broader effort to restore the preventive and people-centred orientation of APSA.

6.6 Institutionalising lessons learned through preserving APSA's strategic memory

The discussions of the dialogue observed that many of the individuals responsible for designing and implementing APSA's most successful mediation initiatives are now leaving public service, taking with them decades of accumulated political knowledge that has never been systematically documented or incorporated into institutional practice.

The discussion highlighted a recurring paradox within APSA. Many of the Union's most innovative practices, including the internal division of labour that characterised the AU High-Level Implementation Panel, the use of framework communiqués to break political deadlock, the structured relationship between mediation panels and the PSC, and even several procedural rules governing Council deliberations, emerged not through formal institutional design but through practical experience responding to successive crises. Yet, these innovations are not codified as standard practice.

The expert panel therefore argued that one of the APSA review's overlooked priorities should be the deliberate systematic documentation, preservation and transmission of these accumulated lessons and their systematic integration into shaping institutional practice. Proposals included establishing a structured archive of African mediation practice, recording systematic reflections from former senior mediators and Commissioners, creating an alumni network of Peace and Security Department practitioners, and developing concise practice manuals capable of transmitting operational lessons to a new

generation of officials. Such initiatives would strengthen APSA not by creating new institutions but by ensuring that hard-won experience becomes a permanent institutional asset rather than being lost through generational transition.



Dr Shuvai Busuman presenting a case study of the AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan, During the Eexpert Panel convening in Nairobi on 13-14 July 2026

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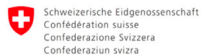
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