

POLICY BRIEF

SIERRA LEONE'S 2024 – 2025 UN SECURITY COUNCIL TENURE AND AFRICA'S RECALIBRATION IN A RETREATING INTERNATIONAL LAW-BASED ORDER

AMANI AFRICA

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SUMMARY

Sierra Leone's 2024–2025 tenure on the United Nations Security Council unfolded during a period of visible retreat from an international law-based order, marked by rising unilateralism, intensifying geopolitical rivalry, selective application of norms, and growing strain on the UN Charter's collective security scheme. Drawing on Sierra Leone's Council experience and the framing of Amani Africa's 2026 Pre-AU Summit High-level Dialogue on 'Africa at a Crossroads: Pan-Africanism, the breakdown of global order, and the Future of Collective Security,' this paper argues that the present moment, while destabilizing, also creates strategic space for African recalibration. Four interrelated pathways emerge: consolidation of African solidarity through the A3 and A3 Plus; principled African engagement on global crises beyond the continent; strategic navigation of multipolarity through coalition-building and stronger resource-governance safeguards; and a dual reform agenda centered on Security Council reform and operational subsidiarity under Chapter VIII. The paper concludes that Africa's policy task is neither inward retreat nor rhetorical resistance, but the practical advancement of African agency: investing in African solutions while sustaining global relevance through principled, coalition-based diplomacy.

I. INTRODUCTION

The point of departure for assessing Sierra Leone's 2024–2025 experience on the United Nations (UN) Security Council is the wider state of contemporary multilateralism. Amani Africa's framing for its 2026 Pre-AU Summit High-level Dialogue describes a global order in

disarray, characterized by rising unilateral action and protectionism, intensifying major-power rivalry, and a diminishing practical authority of international law in governing interstate relations.¹ This diagnosis is not merely descriptive. It has direct implications for the UN Charter-based collective security scheme: when rules are applied selectively and geopolitical division becomes entrenched, the Security Council's ability to prevent escalation, sustain pressure on spoilers, and protect civilians through coherent international action is weakened.

Yet the resulting uncertainty is not destiny. Amani Africa's framing also emphasizes that these pressures, while severe, are not insurmountable if met with political will and collective action, recalling earlier moments when Pan-Africanism supported institutional transformation, including the transition from the OAU to the AU. Sierra Leone's Council tenure is significant in this respect because it demonstrates how an African elected member can convert systemic constraint into strategic opportunity.

Sierra Leone's experience confirms a dual reality. First, the UN Charter-based collective security system is

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¹ *Africa at a Crossroads: Pan-Africanism, the breakdown of global order, and the Future of Collective Security, Amani Africa High-level pre-AU Summit Policy Dialogue held on 10 February 2026* <https://amaniafrica-et.org/africa-at-a-crossroads-pan-africanism-the-breakdown-of-global-order-and-the-future-of-collective-security/>

under tremendous and unprecedented strain. Second, that system remains indispensable, particularly for Africa and for small and medium-sized states that rely on rules, procedure, and legitimacy as strategic assets. The practical implication is therefore not abandonment of multilateralism, but its reconstruction through stronger regional agency, disciplined coalition-building, and principled consistency. Put differently, **if the global order is fragmenting, Africa must integrate, politically, diplomatically, and operationally, so that its voice is unified and its solutions are legitimate, funded, and effective.**

II. SIERRA LEONE'S COUNCIL POSTURE: PRINCIPLED MULTILATERALISM AND AFRICAN AGENCY

Sierra Leone entered the Council with a posture that may be described as principled multilateralism anchored in African agency. Its tenure, as reflected in its own recent post-conflict history, emphasized a commitment to UN Charter principles, rule-of-law reasoning, practical problem-solving, and responsiveness to African priorities and emerging threats. This orientation was not abstract. Sierra Leone identified and pursued priorities including stronger African representation and partnership, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, human rights and accountability, the Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace and Security agendas, small arms and light weapons, terrorism and emerging threats (including climate-related security risks), food security and Council reform.

These priorities were operationalized through its two Council presidencies, work in subsidiary bodies, penholdership and co-penholdership roles, and thematic initiatives. Sierra Leone's tenure also underscored leadership through sanctions and working-group responsibilities, including chairing the 1533 Sanctions Committee concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the 2206 Sanctions Committee concerning South Sudan, and the Informal Working Group on International Tribunals, roles that elevated attention to compliance, implementation gaps, and protection concerns. In addition, Sierra Leone's engagement in co-penholdership on West Africa (UNOWAS) and in informal expert processes, including on WPS, the International Criminal Court caucus and climate-security, illustrates a broader lesson: **influence in the Council depends not only on formal voting moments, but on the sustained craft of drafting, negotiation, and coalition building and maintenance.**

III. AFRICAN RECALIBRATION THROUGH FOUR STRATEGIC PATHWAYS

3.1. A3/A3 Plus as an Institutional Form of African Agency

The first and most immediate lesson from Sierra Leone's tenure is that Africa's influence increases significantly when it acts cohesively. **Sierra Leone's experience frames the A3/A3+ not as a mere coordination mechanism but as a strategic instrument of African agency.**²

² See Amani Africa, *Making Africa's voice matter in the UN Security Council: Bridging the gap between ambition and reality in the role of the African three members of the UNSC*. <https://>

In practice, the A3+ (with Algeria, Guyana, Sierra Leone and Mozambique in 2024, Somalia in 2025) increasingly functioned as a cohesive voting and negotiating bloc, improving Africa's leverage and reducing external 'divide-and-rule' pressures. The A3 Plus format, when aligned, further expanded that leverage beyond African files by enabling coordinated interventions that could shape outcomes or block harmful drafts.

This development matters at a deeper level because it reflects solidarity in operational form and the growing practice of non-indifference, Africa's move from passive observation toward active protection in grave circumstances. Sierra Leone's 'lived practice' during the tenure points to concrete disciplines necessary to sustain such unity: early coordination around shared red lines, common language, and sequencing; principled rather than performative cohesion; and stronger alignment between New York diplomacy and AU Peace and Security Council deliberations in Addis Ababa. In a fragmented international system, cohesion is itself a source of power. **The policy implication is that A3/A3+ coordination now institutionalized as a pillar of Africa's global diplomacy must be continuously strengthened rather than treated as episodic success.**

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Amani Africa Report 9 (March 2021) & Security Council Report, From the margins to the centre: The rise of the A3 in the UN Security Council, Research Report (2025, 4). https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/A3_research_report_2025.pdf

3.2. Principled African Engagement Beyond 'African Files'

The second pathway concerns Africa's broader global agenda. Sierra Leone's experience underscores that Africa's legitimacy rises when it applies principles consistently across the Council's portfolio, not only on African situations. In an era of pervasive accusations of double standards, consistency becomes a strategic asset: it makes African positions more predictable and norm-grounded, enlarges coalition options with members seeking de-escalation and humanitarian outcomes, and positions Africa as a credible contributor to global crisis management.

This approach was evident in Africa's growing engagement on crises beyond the continent, including Palestine (through the Elected 10 members), Colombia, Haiti, Myanmar, Afghanistan, and Syria, not to 'take sides' in bloc terms, but to insist on principles, including civilian protection, humanitarian access, respect for international law (including international humanitarian law), negotiated political pathways, accountability, and restraint. Sierra Leone's tenure suggests that a small state can exercise meaningful influence by being consistent, constructive, and solutions-oriented. It also suggests that Africa's credibility is amplified when peace and security debates are connected to peacebuilding, food security, climate risks, and institutional resilience, thereby re-centering prevention and recovery as core security work rather than optional add-ons.

3.3. Multipolarity, Middle Powers, and the Political Economy of Conflict

The third pathway concerns multipolarity. Sierra Leone's experience is clear that multipolarity is not only a source of risk; it can also provide negotiating space, if Africa is strategic. In polarized Council conditions, middle powers and the global south more broadly can act as bridges for de-escalation, mediation, and consensus-building when engaged early and seriously. This is not merely aspirational. It is a practical response to great-power deadlock.³

At the same time, Sierra Leone's analysis identifies the darker side of multipolar competition: resource competition and illicit flows, conflict entrepreneurs and spoilers, weaponized misinformation, and governance gaps around critical resources. These dynamics complicate mediation and can prolong instability. The policy implication is significant: **peace diplomacy and resource governance can no longer be treated as separate domains.** Resource governance is increasingly a peace and security issue because weak governance systems can be exploited to finance violence and fragment settlements.

Sierra Leone's practical guidance is therefore a disciplined diplomacy of coalition building and mediation craft. Africa should build 'variable geometry'

³ Amani Africa, *Report of the Joint Namibia-Amani Africa High-level Panel of Experts on Africa and the reform of the multilateral system (August 2024)* p 45 on the contribution of African states for effectiveness of the UNSC by operating as moderating force for bridging the divide between major powers available on <https://amani-africa.org/wp-content/uploads/AFRICA-AND-THE-REFORM-OF-THE-MULTILATERAL-SYSTEM.pdf>

coalitions anchored in A3/A3+ coordination and broaden them to elected members and cross-regional groupings for specific outcomes. It should also strengthen mediation practice through early quiet diplomacy, credible incentives, calibrated pressure, and sustained coordination with regional actors. In this approach, Africa's task is not to choose blocs, but to organize partnerships that deliver peace while insulating processes from spoilers and external predation.

3.4. Reform and Subsidiarity: Legitimacy and Operational Readiness

The fourth pathway is reform, understood in two linked senses: reform of the Security Council and reform in practice through subsidiarity between the UN and African institutions. Sierra Leone's experience reinforces that Security Council reform remains central because the legitimacy deficit persists, especially regarding Africa's representation and voice. At the same time, Sierra Leone's analysis highlights a more immediate reform track: subsidiarity under Chapter VIII as an operational necessity in a strained global system.

Progress toward more predictable financing for AU-led peace support operations must be acknowledged, through the adoption of resolution 2719(2023). However, it must also be emphasized that the political and operational bargain remains incomplete. This was more evident on the question of financing the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), which one permanent member opposed. The central point is that subsidiarity cannot be rhetorical.

Regional leadership must be matched by joint planning and clear mandates, human rights and compliance standards, transparency and accountability, and predictable financing and burden-sharing. Equally important, subsidiarity must not devolve into fragmented regionalism. Africa's recalibration requires a coherent division of labour among AU organs, RECs, and New York diplomacy so that Council outcomes reflect regional realities and regional operations align with agreed political strategy.

IV. WHAT SIERRA LEONE'S TENURE DEMONSTRATED IN PRACTICE

Sierra Leone's tenure provides a useful empirical illustration of how an elected African member can exercise agency under difficult Council conditions. Its tenure points to norm-setting and agenda-shaping contributions, including sustained attention to Council reform, African representation, peace consolidation, and regional approaches and leadership. It also records thematic engagement on prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, human rights and accountability, Women Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS), terrorism and the Sahel, climate-related security risks, illicit small arms and light weapons, and food insecurity as a peace and security issue.

A further aspect of Sierra Leone's method was the use of cultural and public diplomacy alongside formal Council work. In a legitimacy-contested environment, narrative matters. **Public diplomacy can strengthen coalitions, build confidence, and humanize policy choices that might otherwise be**

reduced to procedural contestation.

This broader diplomatic method deserves greater analytical attention in scholarship on elected Security Council members, especially African members operating under conditions of systemic polarization.

V. POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICA AT THE 'CROSSROADS'

The convergence between Sierra Leone's Council experience and Amani Africa's 'Africa at a Crossroads' framing yields a clear policy agenda. African solidarity in New York must be treated as an institutional capability rather than an occasional achievement. **A3/A3+ coordination requires structured consultation cycles, stronger analytical support, and disciplined drafting capacity.** Addis Ababa–New York linkages must be made more systematic so that AU and PSC strategy informs Security Council diplomacy in real time, and vice versa. The Oran Process provides an important convening space. It can play the role for a more structured dialogue and coordination space on substantive issues in the future. Also, in the system of two-years tenure for elected members, the African Union permanent Observer Mission, must be well resourced to serve effectively as the A3/A3+ institutional memory and secretariat. **The work of think tanks such as Amani Africa also provide resources that can be harnessed for advancing closer alignment between Addis Ababa and New York.**

Africa should also continue to engage non-African files with principled consistency, allowing African positions to travel across the Council's broader agenda and thereby strengthening Africa's global

credibility. At the same time, multipolarity should be approached as a field for strategic coalition-building rather than bloc alignment, while anti-spoiler and resource-governance safeguards are integrated into the continent's peace and security architecture. Finally, subsidiarity must be translated into operational readiness through predictable financing, standards, accountability, and coherent coordination among the AU, RECs, and the UN. Across all these priorities, prevention, peacebuilding, and institutional resilience should be treated as central security work.

VI. CONCLUSION

Sierra Leone's 2024–2025 Security Council tenure offers more than a national diplomatic account; it provides a policy-relevant case study in African agency under conditions of systemic strain. The broader international environment, a retreating international law-based order, hardened geopolitical rivalry, and weakening confidence in collective security, has undeniably constrained the Security Council's effectiveness. Yet Sierra Leone's experience demonstrates that these constraints can also sharpen the strategic value of African cohesion, principled diplomacy, coalition building, and institutional reform.

The core conclusion is therefore both practical and strategic. Africa should invest in African solutions and a more resilient peace and security architecture while maintaining outward relevance through principled, coalition-based engagement on global crises. This requires building capacity inward, early warning, mediation, peace support operations, governance resilience, institutional coordination, while remaining globally engaged in shaping outcomes and

defending principles. In a world retreating from law, **Africa's task is not to retreat in response, but to advance the international law-based order through unified voice, financed solutions, and principled realism.**



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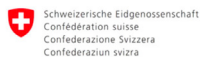
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Amani Africa is an independent African based policy research, training and consulting think tank with a specialization and primary focus on African multilateral policy processes, particularly those relating to the African union.

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