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Extended Edition

**AFRICA IN AN EVOLVING
GLOBAL ORDER**



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FRANK,
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CANDID
DIALOGUE.

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INTRODUCTION

The Secretariat of the Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa (Tana Forum) is pleased to present this extended edition of the 2024 Tana Policy Papers, aimed at informing discussions at the 11th Tana Forum under the theme *Africa in an Evolving Global Order*. This year's policy briefs critically examine the implications of the shifting global geopolitical landscape for Africa—particularly the threats posed to multilateralism. It advances concrete and actionable policy recommendations aimed at strengthening Africa's strategic positioning, safeguarding its development priorities, and promoting collective regional interests within an evolving global governance architecture.

In *From Crisis to Constructive Multipolarity: Rethinking Multilateralism through IGAD's Mediation in South Sudan*, Dr. Ibrahim Sakawa Magara assesses IGAD's facilitation of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), analyzing its strengths, contradictions and lasting impact. His recommendations emphasize strengthening institutional and financial autonomy, advancing knowledge sovereignty and African epistemologies, promoting inclusive and participatory peace processes and enhancing regional diplomatic coherence amid a period of intense strain on global multilateralism.

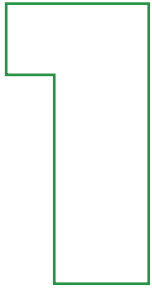
Is African Multilateralism in Crisis? Regional Peace Missions and the Challenge of Global Disengagement by Dr. Antoine Depadou Fouda examines the future of African multilateralism in light of UN mission drawdowns and financial constraints. Drawing on case studies from the Sahel, Somalia, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the policy brief identifies practical levers for fostering a more autonomous and resilient African multilateralism.

The final paper, *Non-Alignment Revisited: Africa's Foreign Policy Options in a Polarized World Order* by Kehinde Tola Benjamin, revisits the principles of non-alignment in today's increasingly polarized world. It traces the history and evolving relevance of the concept, explores the foreign policy dilemmas African states have faced in recent decades and proposes pathways toward a coherent, sustainable continental foreign policy that safeguards Africa's interests in a divided global order.

We hope this extended edition of policy briefs will inspire renewed thinking, ignite meaningful dialogue and incite constructive debate on African multilateralism in a multipolar world. Such exchanges, we believe, are essential to generating innovative policy options for addressing the continent's most pressing peace and security challenges.

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From Crisis to Constructive Multipolarity: Rethinking Multilateralism Through IGAD's Mediation in South Sudan

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Executive Summary

The decline of the liberal international order and fragmentation of global governance challenge Africa's developmental, peace and security aspirations. This policy brief examines the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)'s mediation in South Sudan, demonstrating how African institutions can reconfigure peace processes through strategic pragmatism and Pan-African norms such as *Ubuntu* and *Pax Africana*. This policy brief critically examines IGAD's facilitation of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). Drawing on a pragmatic Pan-African perspective, the brief posits that far from being a mere regional intervention, IGAD's approach represents a shift toward a form of situated multilateralism. Implying a hybrid, context-sensitive model that blends elite consensus, informal diplomacy and communitarian ethics. While IGAD's efforts reveal the institutional weaknesses and contradictions of African multilateralism, they also demonstrate the growing capacity of African regional bodies to innovate and lead in peace diplomacy. This policy brief identifies key lessons and proposes policy recommendations to strengthen regional-led peace-making in Africa, enhance institutional autonomy and promote inclusive and pluralistic approaches to peace-making at a time when global multilateralism has come under severe strain.

Key Points

IGAD's mediation in South Sudan exemplifies a shift toward situated multilateralism, prioritising regional and local legitimacy, elite consensus, and contextual pragmatism as an alternative to the declining liberal peace approach.

The R-ARCSS represented a notable achievement in African-led diplomacy but also highlighted the limitations of elite-driven agreements and institutional weaknesses.

African regional organisations like IGAD are not merely implementing global norms but are increasingly shaping them through informal diplomacy, contending forms of hybrid governance and Pan-African solidarity.

Sustainable peace requires inclusive engagement and long-term transformation, moving beyond short-term stabilisation and toward structural reform and participatory governance frameworks.

Policy coherence, institutional strengthening and epistemic pluralism are critical in enabling regional bodies like IGAD to evolve into credible and proactive architects of continental peace and security governance.

Introduction

As violent conflicts intensify and global crises stretch the capacity of multilateral institutions, African regional bodies are no longer optional actors in collective peace and security governance. They are central to the continent's security future. The relapse of South Sudan's peace process amid mounting humanitarian costs and fractured regional diplomacy calls for a decisive reassessment of how region-led mediation efforts in Africa are conceived and executed. In this context, IGAD's intervention in South Sudan offers timely lessons not just for conflict resolution, but for reimagining the role of African regional bodies in a shifting global peace architecture. Now, more than ever, a recalibration of regional peace-making models is not simply desirable but essential. IGAD's efforts are, however, constrained by limited financial autonomy, intra-regional competition and overdependence on donor funding, which complicate sustained mediation. These constraints shape what regional ownership can realistically deliver in fragile contexts.

The liberal international order, founded on Western-led institutions and technocratic peace frameworks, is undergoing significant turbulence and facing increasing criticism for externally imposed solutions that often fall short of achieving lasting or inclusive peace.¹ Yet critical scholarship still narrowly focuses on the international-local binary² and under-theorises post-liberal peace, such as hybridity, from a regional lens.³ This oversight persists even as Africa's regional organisations increasingly shape continental norms.⁴ Addressing this gap requires context-sensitive, practice-informed analysis that enables decision-makers to better grasp how their interventions intersect with local and regional dynamics. Anchored in the quest for *African solutions to African problems* and aligned with the aspirations of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), this perspective underscores the imperative to foreground African agency at a time when global multilateralism is undergoing profound transformation. Global multilateral strain and transformations present both risks and opportunities for Africa. As traditional global institutions falter, African regional organisations must step forward to assert agency, redefine

norms and shape peace and security outcomes in ways that are historically and contextually grounded and politically pragmatic.

Despite its institutional shortcomings, IGAD provides a compelling example of this shift. Following the outbreak of civil war in South Sudan in 2013, IGAD assumed the lead mediation role in a complex and volatile political landscape. The organisation's facilitation of the R-ARCSS marked a significant moment in African-led diplomacy.

Yet, much of the existing literature on IGAD's role disproportionately focuses on its institutional weaknesses⁵ and the shortcomings of the R-ARCSS⁶, often overlooking its strategic and stabilising contributions. Despite its flaws, the R-ARCSS marked a formal end to South Sudan's brutal civil war, created a framework for political transition and arguably prevented further mass atrocities. It is important to recognise, without romanticising, IGAD's pragmatic diplomacy, regional leverage and capacity to forge elite consensus under volatile conditions. IGAD's intervention in South Sudan, though controversial and imperfect, offers valuable insights into the potential and limitations of African-led regional peace processes in complex conflict settings. This policy brief does so, while recognising that the peace process and political transition in South Sudan have been faltering. Among others, the R-ARCSS is plagued by implementation delays around security reform, Transitional Justice (TJ) and constitutional transformation, which have since given way to renewed violence and political fragmentation. Indeed, the recent controversial arrest of Riek Machar⁷ has exposed the fragility of elite-driven stabilisation efforts. The humanitarian crisis has been deepening and regional leadership fractured, with IGAD largely sidelined and seemingly unable to coordinate a coherent response.⁸ These developments underscore the limits of transactional peace and short-term fixes.

This policy brief critically examines the strengths, contradictions and enduring impact of IGAD's mediation in South Sudan. It asserts that IGAD adopted a form of situated multilateralism, anchored in regional knowledge, elite negotiation and political pragmatism tailored

to the realities of the Horn of Africa (HoA). Reflecting broader continental shifts toward hybrid governance and normative pluralism, where regional actors increasingly shape peace and security outcomes with a potential to instil African perspectives, such as *Ubuntu*-inspired integration⁹ and operationalisation of *Pax Africana*.¹⁰ The South Sudan experience also exposes critical limitations, including institutional fragility, exclusionary practices and a reliance on elite bargains that lack sustainability.

Urgent reforms are needed to strengthen regional capacity, embed inclusive engagement and assert strategic autonomy. As Africa navigates a fragmented global order, the policy challenge is clear: how can IGAD recalibrate its peace-making model to deliver inclusive, resilient and enforceable peace amid intensifying regional and geopolitical volatility?

Rethinking Regionalism in Africa

The liberal international order, long upheld by institutions such as the UN and Bretton Woods system, is facing a crisis of legitimacy and functionality. The UN's increasingly worrying paralysis and palpable inability of international liberal mechanisms to address global inequality, violent conflicts and the demands of post-colonial societies have triggered a growing search for alternative models of multilateralism. Within this evolving geopolitical context, African regional organisations are increasingly, although not inherently or uniformly so, leveraging their proximity, contextual knowledge and regional legitimacy to assert Africa's relevance and agency. Their ability to craft forms of engagement that challenge universalist, externally driven peace frameworks, however, depends on addressing internal capacity constraints and political fragmentation.

Situated Multilateralism and African Agency

Despite persistent critiques of institutional weakness, IGAD has demonstrated notable strategic resilience and growing regional

influence, particularly in the realm of conflict mediation. Its leadership in the South Sudan peace process, although contested, illustrates a form of situated multilateralism. This model, rooted in regional knowledge and informal diplomacy, prioritised negotiated stability, phased reform and elite consensus over technocratic solutions. This adaptability allowed IGAD to navigate the region's complex political terrain, marked by shifting alliances and competing interests¹¹, while maintaining a measure of legitimacy among member states. This was visible in IGAD's use of informal, leader-level brokerage to secure elite buy-in for the R-ARCSS and the subsequent institutionalisation of monitoring through the Revitalised Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (R-JMEC), which, while imperfect, helped stabilise the immediate post-agreement environment.

The R-ARCSS, brokered with the involvement of regional leaders such as Uganda's President Museveni and Sudan's then-President Omar al-Bashir¹², exemplifies IGAD's role as a flexible platform for regional diplomacy. Notably, IGAD operated alongside AU mechanisms and external partners whose technical and financial roles were consequential. These dynamics sometimes enabled mediation, yet competing priorities also complicated coordination and enforcement. While its processes are not without limitations – such as institutional weaknesses, elite dominance and donor dependence – IGAD's model reflects a deeper Pan-African tradition of subsidiarity, the role of elders and consensus-building. This reflects the AU's principle of *African solutions to African problems*, rooted in the norm of Pan-African solidarity.¹³ This norm is operationalised through the APSA mechanisms, such as the Panel of the Wise (PoW), positioning IGAD as a functional, context-sensitive actor navigating a complex political environment.¹⁴ Assessing IGAD through this lens highlights its adaptive capacity and reinforces the need for policy support that strengthens, rather than dismisses, Africa's regional mechanisms.

The Practice and Limitation of Pax Africana

IGAD's actions in South Sudan can also be understood through the lens of *Pax Africana*,

originally articulated by Ali Mazrui¹⁵ in the 60s as a vision for African self-determination in peace-making. It emphasises regional ownership, normative autonomy and decolonised governance structures¹⁶ and closely interlinks with the Pan-African solidarity norm which underly the establishment of the AU¹⁷ and the quest for decolonial peace.¹⁸

While IGAD's mediation affirmed many of these ideals, including political ownership and cultural embeddedness, it also highlighted contradictions. Donor funding shaped key aspects, civil society inclusion was largely tokenistic and symbolic and internal divisions weakened cohesion and credibility.

Yet, a critical question persists: did IGAD genuinely wield normative authority and institutional legitimacy in the eyes of the South Sudanese, or did it function largely as a conduit for elite bargaining shaped by state interests and donor influence? This tension calls into question the operational authenticity of *Pax Africana* when sovereignty-driven calculations obstruct meaningful regional enforcement.¹⁹

Nonetheless, the mediation yielded notable achievements, including the cessation of large-scale violence, the re-establishment of a transitional government and the institutionalisation of monitoring mechanisms like R-JMEC. These outcomes, albeit fragile, speak to the capacity of African regional organisations to serve as norm innovators within an evolving peace-making architecture situated in an increasingly multipolar and uncertain global order.

Norm Innovation in a Multipolar World

IGAD's experience is emblematic of a broader normative realignment in African peace and security governance. Regional organisations are increasingly embracing hybrid models that merge formal and informal structures, state and non-state actors, and indigenous and international norms. This shift reflects "strategic hybridisation"²⁰, wherein African peace-making praxis adopts tools that are both context-sensitive and globally legible.

IGAD's pragmatic, adaptive mediation redefined legitimate peace-making, contrasting

the rigidity of UN-led processes. While IGAD lacked robust enforcement mechanisms, it operated as a platform for elite bargaining, crisis management and iterative negotiation. A model arguably more aligned with the realities of the HoA's fragile statehood and geopolitics.

Yet, IGAD's case underscores a persistent contradiction. While the APSA aspires to assert African normative agency, the sovereignty-driven self-interests of member states often erode collective enforcement. Without overarching enforcement mechanisms, IGAD's situated multilateralism risks stagnating into paralysis, where mediation becomes hostage to the very state actors meant to implement peace.²¹

IGAD's experiences speak to the APSA's subsidiarity, in practice, whereby RECs can lead context-sensitive mediation while the AU helps close enforcement gaps. This indicates how burden-sharing between the AU and REC can be operationalised in practices of early warning, mediation and sanctions follow-through, to ensure that regional pragmatism matches continental enforcement.

The Imperative of Inclusion and Accountability

Despite its achievements, the IGAD-led peace process for South Sudan was marked by significant exclusions. Women, youth and grassroots civil society actors were largely sidelined from substantive participation, reducing the legitimacy and sustainability of the R-ARCSS. Civil society voices were often fragmented, politicised, or absorbed into elite networks, complicating their potential to function as independent agents of change.²² Furthermore, TJ mechanisms outlined in the agreement, including the Hybrid Court for South Sudan (HCSS), have stagnated, perpetuating a cycle of impunity and disillusionment.

This raises an important question: Can regional peace processes transcend elite pacts and serve as vehicles for genuine societal transformation? The South Sudan case suggests that while regional ownership is necessary, it is not sufficient. Without meaningful inclusion, credible enforcement and epistemic pluralism,

African multilateralism risks replicating the very hierarchies it seeks to challenge.

The spirit of *Ubuntu*, which affirms relational ethics and communitarian regionalism,²³ can enhance regional peace-making. The vital shuttle diplomacy carried out by faith-based leaders and civil society actors in South Sudan, including in the recent crisis, experienced at the beginning of 2025, represents a culturally resonant model of peace-making. These actors embodied the ethics of mutual recognition and bottom-up legitimacy often absent in IGAD's elite-centric peace architecture. Their systematic integration into IGAD's peace-making would not only enhance inclusiveness but also affirm a distinctly African epistemological foundation for everyday peace.²⁴

Furthermore, the sidelining of Kenya's Tumaini Initiative, despite its resonance,²⁵ signalled perceived bias toward incumbents. The resulting strategic cost is the loss of civil credibility and a missed opportunity to mainstream and implement plural tracks under IGAD.

Conclusion

IGAD's mediation in South Sudan highlights both the promise and limits of situated multilateralism. While the R-ARCSS halted violence and shaped a fragile transition to governance, the post-agreement predicaments, including the threat of relapse as witnessed at the beginning of 2025, reveal the weaknesses of elite-driven frameworks. Yet this does not diminish IGAD's contributions; instead, it underscores the urgent necessity to adjust regional mediation to align with the challenges of an unpredictable and multipolar world.

To move from reactive peace-making to proactive norm-setting, IGAD must institutionalise its culturally grounded model – rooted in situated multilateralism, *Ubuntu* ethics and the vision of *Pax Africana* – within robust, accountable structures. Achieving sustainable peace requires a combination of regional ownership, legitimate political processes and inclusive governance structures. By investing in civil legitimacy and curbing elite capture, IGAD and its peers can become central actors in shaping a more plural and equitable

global multilateral order. They can achieve this while coordinating with the AU and external partners to address the glaring enforcement and capacity gaps.

Recommendations

- Strengthen institutions and financial autonomy by professionalising mediation units with dedicated analysis and crisis-monitoring capacity while increasing member state funding. This will reduce donor-dependence and build credible, self-reliant mechanisms capable of leading timely, evidence-based and strategically autonomous peace interventions.
- Promote inclusive and participatory peace processes by institutionalising civil society, women, youth and religious actors as active peace-actors at the regional level. Draw on AU frameworks, e.g., women, peace and security protocols, to institutionalise and enhance participatory peace mechanisms and processes. This will create more legitimate, representative and sustainable peace processes by ensuring that diverse perspectives shape decision-making and implementation.
- Enhance regional diplomatic coherence by leading harmonisation of mediation efforts through a unified roadmap with clear sequencing and accountability, and establish a code of conduct for member states to manage conflicting interests. This will foster coordination, transparency and credibility in regional diplomacy while minimising fragmented interventions and strengthening collective leverage in complex peace processes.
- Strengthen enforcement and accountability by expanding sanctions and enforcement mechanisms in partnership with the AU. For example, prioritising the establishment of the HCSS to address impunity in South Sudan. This will not only act as a deterrence but also enhance the credibility and effectiveness of regional peace agreements by ensuring compliance and fostering accountability and justice.

- Advance knowledge sovereignty and African epistemologies by investing in indigenous conflict-resolution systems and *Ubuntu*-based ethics and partnering with African academic and policy institutions to reinforce IGAD's intellectual base of context-based knowledge. This will strengthen the legitimacy, relevance and innovation of regional peace interventions by grounding them in African-driven perspectives, practices and intellectual leadership in peace praxis.

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Is African Multilateralism in Crisis? Regional Peace Missions and the Challenge of Global Disengagement

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Executive Summary

Africa faces a security paradox: while terrorism, local instability, and military coups are multiplying, international engagement in peace operations is steadily declining. The progressive withdrawal of missions such as MINUSMA, MONUSCO, and ATMIS puts to the test the continent's capacity to guarantee its own stability. Regional and African-led missions, although essential, remain constrained by heavy financial dependence, coordination gaps, the ambivalent role of certain states, and the growing competition among organisations that further undermine the coherence of African multilateralism. Drawing on the cases of the Sahel, Somalia, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, this brief identifies concrete levers to strengthen a more autonomous, coherent, and sustainable African multilateralism.

Key Points

The UN's disengagement exposes the fragility of Africa's collective security mechanisms.

Financial dependence and weak logistics remain core structural limits.

The AU's dual role requires clearer coordination with RECs.

State agency and REC competition undermine coherence.

Intra-African cooperation is central to legitimacy and autonomy.

Introduction

The idea of autonomous African multilateralism, rooted in Ali Mazrui's doctrine of Pax Africana, holds that only Africans can legitimately resolve their crises, with external intervention confined to limited support (Mazrui, 1967). This vision was institutionalised with the creation of the African Union (AU) in 2002 and its African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) (African Union – Peace and Security Commission, n.d.-a), which is built upon the Protocol Establishing the Peace and Security Council (PSC) (African Union, 2002). This framework includes several pillars that reflect the commitment to provide the continent with its own tools for crisis management.

The Tripoli Declaration of 31 August 2009 (African Union, n.d.-b) reaffirms this strategic orientation. It sets out the principle of “African solutions to African problems,” viewing peace and security as prerequisites for stability, development, and regional integration (African Union, 2009). This text remains a key point of reference today for legitimising African multilateral initiatives. However, the realisation of this principle continues to face structural limitations.

In fact, since the early 2000s, African multilateralism has developed within a paradoxical global environment: on the one hand, the proliferation of external partnerships has helped to fill certain logistical and financial gaps; on the other hand, this reliance has often constrained the strategic autonomy of the AU and Regional Economic Communities (RECs). Hybrid operations, such as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), later renamed the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) (African Union, 2022), and most recently the African Union Somalia Support Mission (AUSSOM) in January 2025 (African Union, n.d.-a), or the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA), illustrate Africa's capacity to act, but also its persistent reliance on external logistical support (Williams, 2018).

In recent years, however, a gradual disengagement of these traditional supporters has been observed. The United Nations

Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) withdrew from the country in 2023 at the request of the Malian government (Nations Unies, 2023). The United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has been gradually drawing down since 2024 (Follorou, 2024). ATMIS was expected to transfer all security responsibilities to Somali forces by the end of 2024 (African Union Peace and Security Council, 2022).

These developments reflect both “donor fatigue” and the increasing complexity of the international order, marked by the emergence of new actors (Russia, Turkey, and China) who are engaging on the African security scene through bilateral frameworks that are sometimes competitive (Institute for Security Studies, 2023). This geopolitical reconfiguration raises a fundamental question: can Africa alone compensate for this growing security vacuum?

Facing this security paradox, the central question remains the real viability of African multilateralism: does the AU and its RECs have sufficient means to replace a security architecture that has long relied on external multilateral actors?

The cases of the Sahel, Somalia, the Central African Republic (CAR), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), selected for this brief, each illustrate a different scenario of “multilateralism under constraint”. The objective of this paper is therefore twofold: first, to highlight the structural strengths and weaknesses of Africa's peace and security system; second, to propose realistic avenues for consolidation. This analytical effort is rooted in the legacy of the Pax Africana, while acknowledging that this vision must now be renewed to address the challenges of an increasingly multipolar world order.

In this brief, multilateralism refers to the organised cooperation of African states, mainly through the AU and the RECs, to collectively manage security crises. It implies shared mechanisms of decision-making, funding, and deployment. This brief provides an in-depth analysis of the current dynamics of African multilateralism and highlights the political

implications of the gradual disengagement of international partners while assessing African responses to this major challenge. By examining concrete cases, identifying structural vulnerabilities, and proposing avenues for transformation, this discussion aims to clarify the key issues and policy levers needed to strengthen the autonomy and effectiveness of African regional peace missions.

African Multilateralism in Practice: Four Security Configurations Put to the Test

Since the early 2000s, regional peace missions in Africa have emerged as both a necessary and constrained response to the limitations of traditional international interventions. Each emblematic case sheds light on an aspect of African multilateralism as it faces the complex realities on the ground.

In the Sahel, the G5 Sahel Joint Force, launched in 2017 by Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad, symbolised the sub-regional will to pool resources in response to cross-border terrorism. Its mandate was to secure a 5,000 km stretch of porous borders. However, despite technical and financial support from the European Union, the Force struggled to conduct coordinated and sustained operations. The main obstacles lie in insufficient logistics, cumbersome administrative procedures, weak joint command structures, and the overriding presence of external donors. Its dissolution was formally agreed upon by the member states in 2023 (France24, 2023).

In Somalia, AMISOM, now AUSSOM, remains the longest-standing example of a regional mission logistically supported by external actors. Since 2007, the force has helped contain the expansion of Al-Shabaab, protecting Mogadishu and several strategic corridors. However, its sustainability is under strain: it faces critical shortcomings such as severely inadequate funding, the gradual withdrawal of key contingents like Burundi, unclear governance and command structures, persistent regional tensions, and weak political

cohesion within Somalia (Amani Africa, 2025).

In the CAR, MISCA was the AU's attempt at a rapid response following the failure of the Multinational Force of Central Africa (FOMAC) to contain the advance of the Séléka coalition. The mission was conceived as a transitional bridge toward a more robust UN deployment: MINUSCA. However, MISCA encountered major limitations, including a lack of heavy capabilities (such as armoured vehicles and air support) and complex coordination among national contingents of uneven quality. Its swift handover to MINUSCA underscored the critical need for UN logistical and financial support when a situation escalates into a protracted internal conflict (United Nations Security Council, 2014).

In the DRC, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Intervention Brigade, integrated into MONUSCO, marked a break from traditional UN doctrine. Established in 2013, this offensive brigade succeeded in neutralising the M23, demonstrating the ability of certain SADC member states (South Africa, Tanzania, and Malawi) to deploy seasoned troops and accept a more robust mandate. Nevertheless, the absence of an inclusive political solution in eastern DRC led to the resurgence of the M23 in 2021 and again in 2024 (International Peace Information Service, 2024), underscoring that a one-off military success cannot compensate for structural weaknesses in governance and regional cooperation (Stearns, 2023).

Dependency and Fragmentation: Persistent Vulnerabilities of African Multilateralism

Beyond the diversity of operational theatres, African missions share systemic vulnerabilities that directly challenge the vision of Pax Africana.

First, the AU and its RECs remain heavily dependent on external sources for the majority of their peacekeeping budgets. For instance, the AU Peace Fund is a promising but limited instrument: it has an operational framework and has mobilised over USD 400 million to date (PSC

Insights, 2024), yet its actual capacity to finance large-scale missions remains inadequate and constrained by institutional obstacles (Africa Centre, 2025). As a result, there is continued reliance on mechanisms such as the European Union's African Peace Facility, leaving missions vulnerable to European budgetary decisions.

Second, institutional cooperation and coordination within the APSA remain limited due to the complexity of the relationship between the AU and the RECs. On the ground, overlapping mandates, poor communication between the AU Commissions and REC Secretariats, and bureaucratic duplication reduce responsiveness in times of crisis. The handling of the Malian and Guinean situations by ECOWAS illustrates these shortcomings, as it has at times been perceived as encroaching on the prerogatives of the AU PSC (Institute for Security Studies, 2022).

Another vulnerability lies in the role of African states themselves. African states are not mere implementers of multilateral policies. They leverage their positions within RECs to influence regional decisions in line with their domestic political and security interests. In Mali, with the collapse of the G5 Sahel Joint Force, and in the DRC, with overlapping regional engagements, governments have at times instrumentalised their membership in RECs for political purposes (Bauma et al., 2024). The resulting competition among organisations, notably between the SADC and the East African Community (EAC) in crisis management, exacerbates the fragmentation of African multilateralism and underscores the need for the AU to establish clearer coordination rules with the RECs (Dzinesa & Rusero, 2025). These vulnerabilities are further exacerbated by the growing involvement of external actors such as Russia, China, Turkey, and France, whose bilateral engagements often reshape the balance between RECs and the AU (Hörter, 2022).

Finally, the problem of legitimacy and the information challenge also weigh heavily on the effectiveness of peace missions. Popular consent, which is essential to their success, is often undermined by growing mistrust towards foreign troops, whether UN or African forces. This mistrust is amplified by disinformation

campaigns orchestrated by various actors, including through social media, militias, and influencers. In Mali, for example, criticism of MINUSMA and the promotion of so-called alternative forces have significantly fuelled popular rejection of external interventions (de Coning, 2019).

Rethinking African Security Multilateralism: Levers for Action

Each case examined in this paper demonstrates that an effective regional peace mission relies on four essential elements: stable political leadership with a clear vision; a well-defined chain of command to ensure coordination; reliable funding to guarantee continuity; and a sustained diplomatic strategy to address the structural causes of conflict.

The gradual withdrawal of traditional partners should therefore not be seen solely as a threat, but rather as a strategic opportunity to strengthen the capacity of African institutions to sustainably fulfil their stabilisation mandates. In this regard, three levers are essential to overcoming the structural obstacles identified.

The first lever is to establish a genuinely autonomous financial base, because without stable resources, the ambitions of the Pax Africana will remain dependent on external agendas. The central challenge is to translate political commitments into effective and predictable fiscal mechanisms, while diversifying sources of revenue to reduce vulnerability to traditional donors.

The second lever is to clarify governance and strengthen institutional coherence, because a credible collective security architecture requires a clear allocation of responsibilities between the AU and the RECs. Well-defined mandates, harmonised chains of command, and common coordination tools are necessary to overcome the current fragmentation and ensure the responsiveness of deployments.

The final lever is to renew social legitimacy and local ownership, because the effectiveness of regional missions also depends on their

acceptance by local populations. In a context where disinformation undermines trust, it is essential to strengthen transparency, involve local communities and national representative bodies in decision-making processes, and develop public diplomacy strategies capable of mobilising public opinion in favour of African-led solutions.

Ultimately, transforming African multilateralism requires less rhetoric and more concrete conditions: autonomous financing, clarified governance, and legitimacy rooted close to citizens. These parameters form the essential foundations for translating the Pax Africana into a sustainable response to the continent's security challenges.

Conclusion

The trend of international disengagement brings back to the forefront the question of the robustness of African multilateralism in peace and security. The comparative cases of the Sahel, Somalia, the CAR, and the DRC reveal a persistent tension between the doctrine of "African solutions to African problems" and the operational reality of continuing financial dependence and fragmented institutional responses.

Far from signalling decline, this situation is a strategic opportunity to recalibrate African multilateralism. In a multipolar order marked by both new partnerships and intra-African competition, the challenge is to transform diversity into complementarity rather than rivalry. This requires strengthening endogenous capacities, establishing clearer coordination between the AU and RECs, and ensuring that state agency contributes to coherence rather than fragmentation.

Ultimately, the consolidation of an effective African multilateralism demands a pragmatic balance between sovereignty, integration, and legitimacy. More than a rhetorical aspiration, the Pax Africana must evolve into a collective security framework genuinely shaped and owned by African states and societies. The future of African multilateralism depends less on external guarantees than on stronger intra-African cooperation. This cooperation is the

decisive lever for legitimacy and autonomy, turning diversity into complementarity and making the Pax Africana a tangible reality.

Recommendations

1. Accelerate the operationalisation of the AU Peace Fund through predictable and diversified contributions, to reduce external dependence and guarantee rapid and transparent financing of missions.
2. Establish enforceable AU–REC coordination frameworks to prevent state-driven competition from undermining collective security and ensure that institutional mandates are complementary rather than overlapping.
3. Develop joint logistical platforms, training centres, and intelligence-sharing mechanisms at the continental level to increase interoperability and reduce fragmentation.
4. Broaden strategic partnerships beyond traditional donors by engaging with emerging actors (BRICS, ASEAN, Latin America) to diversify sources of funding, equipment, and training without reinforcing unilateral dependence.

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Non-Alignment Revisited: Africa's Foreign Policy Options in a Polarised World Order

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Executive Summary

The current international system is characterised by constant competition amongst the world powers, such as France, the United States, China, and Russia. The continued widening of geopolitical fault lines and the watering down of multilateral institutions, with new alliances becoming solidified, have increased pressure on African countries and institutions to decide which side of the global divide they belong to or perhaps forge one. In response to the emerging issues in the world today, this policy brief reaffirms the principle of non-alignment as one of the viable and strategic foreign policy options for Africa. The rearticulation and practical expression will strengthen the African Union and subregional blocs, thus enabling the continent to resist various external influences, establish balanced relations with external actors, and have a collective voice in protecting the continent's interests. Historically, non-alignment enabled different African countries to participate in international trade and engage in foreign relations with limited subjection to the conflicts and competition among the great powers. The principle has strategic relevance today, as non-alignment is needed for African countries to navigate the anarchical international system. The policy contributes to the growing discussions about the necessity of an improved, concerted, continental manifestation of non-alignment. To put non-alignment into practice, African institutions such as the AU (and its organs) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) should be given clear responsibilities, policy tools, and resources to coordinate actions and protect the continent's interests.

Key Points

The resurgence of great power competition has revived the urgency for Africa to reassess its foreign policy options.

A modernised, collective, non-alignment strategy is essential for Africa to protect continental sovereignty, developmental interests, and unity.

Non-alignment does not imply disengagement, but rather a balanced and strategic form of diplomacy in which African states and organisations forge a side instead of taking a side in the Great Power conflicts and competition.

The African Union (AU) and regional economic communities (RECs) must lead efforts to institutionalise a coordinated foreign policy stance.

Current risks, such as external pressure, internal conflict, and dependence, must be anticipated and addressed through effective diplomatic dialogue.

Introduction

While strategic competition has long been a defining feature of the international system, the current period marks a qualitative shift. The emergence of China, the increasingly pronounced international presence of Russia, and the declining position of the Global North have created a disjointed and divided world order. Multilateralism seems to grow weaker. Power blocs are taking new forms, and the rules of engagement are now becoming dependent on more strategic alliances rather than shared norms and adherence to international law. With these geopolitical changes, Africa finds itself at a crossroads; pressured at the point of taking sides in a game it did not initiate. Thus, Africa's foreign policy space can be described as one that is caught in a geopolitical quagmire. The continent is seemingly becoming entangled within the existing geopolitical and economic realities caused by major world powers. The aftereffects of the Russia-Ukraine war have reshaped global diplomacy. Policy makers now grapple with the dilemma of balancing economic reliance on China's expansionist policies with the conditionalities attached to Western-supported financial aid. This tension has become a central challenge for African governments in recent years.

This period of strategic uncertainty provokes the need to reconsider the policy of non-alignment. This time, not as a stance of passive resistance or as an ideological conviction, but as an active posture that centres upon African agency and hands-on realism. Non-alignment offers an avenue with which African countries can continue interacting with the world and remain independent, as well as avoid becoming a playground in proxy wars involving major world powers. Non-alignment can make the continent powerful enough to occupy a strategic position, which drives peace and protects the quest for achieving Africa's development aspirations.

This policy brief focuses on the foreign policy of Africa in an increasingly polarised world, where African countries must renew and redefine the principles of non-alignment to safeguard Africa's own interests. It analyses the history and the shifting relevance of the principle and

focuses on the foreign policy dilemmas African states have been facing in the past decades, and provides ways of how to develop a common and sustainable continental foreign policy for addressing the ever-polarising state of today's international system.

The Legacy of Non-Alignment in Africa: Lessons from the Cold War Era

The concept of non-alignment emerged due to the bilateral dynamics of the Cold War era. In the case of newly independent African states during the 1950s and 1960s, non-alignment was not so much a diplomatic choice; rather, it was a political declaration of independence in a world where Western capitalist influence and Eastern communist influence were growing. In Belgrade, in 1961, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was established. It was the aspirations of the nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America to complete the process of decolonisation and become independent without being entrapped in ideological and military wrangles involving major powers of the time (Mathews, 1987). During the 1960s, African leaders realised that there was a necessity to achieve freedom and sovereignty of their respective countries. In their minds, they never thought that peaceful relations, decolonisation and economic development could ever be attained if the continent is thrown into geopolitical quagmires by great powers (Benjamin, 2011).

Non-alignment did offer the African nations a platform through which they could be assured of political sovereignty and a more equitable world order. The movement also advocated for international issues as well as Pan-African ideals of African Unity. The African non-alignment practice was not without contradictions. Although the principle underlined neutrality and independence, a good number of African states received financial assistance, military support, and were ideologically influenced by either the Eastern or Western divide (Osisioma, 2020). It also brought about internal divisions and dependency on foreign powers, which undermined the very autonomy that the policy was designed for. Furthermore, the non-

alignment policy was not always consistent due to the lack of a common shared African foreign policy. The political interests of independent countries outweighed the principles of the movement.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, non-alignment left a lasting lesson that Africa needed to speak with a collective voice in matters concerning the continent. This is crucial to having a stronger bargaining power on the international stage. The Cold War times made it clear that African countries were able to decline the zero-sum choices the international system offered and focus on development, peacebuilding, and intra-regional cooperation. This is evident with the creation of subregional bodies like the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) established in 1975, the East African Community (EAC) established in 1967 and the 1980 Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) memorandum of understanding, which laid the foundation for the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The principle ensured policy manoeuvring to a stage where countries had the political freedom to diversify their partnerships, without the need to engage in wars, but concentrate on national interests. African states that deviated from strict non-alignment often faced political, security, and developmental costs, as seen in Congo under Patrice Lumumba, where Cold War pressures and external interventions undermined sovereignty and domestic stability (Kendall, 2019).

Non-alignment was not free of challenges even after the end of the Cold War in 1991. Russia and the Euro-American sphere remained in ideological/strategic tensions with one another, NATO remained a Cold War-based alliance, and China rapidly became an economic and ideological counterweight to Western influence. This has forced the African states to manoeuvre between a complex and ever-changing global order, as they seek to balance the old conventions of non-alignment with a new reality of a renewed great-power competition.

Current Foreign Policy Challenges and Pressures

The renewal of strategic competition, mostly involving the United States, China, and Russia, has complicated Africa's external interactions and subjected a great number of African states to increasing pressures to be affiliated with one side or the other. Geopolitical, economic, and institutional choices have continually tested Africa's ability to exercise strategic autonomy, and these decisions are both complex and carry significant consequences. These tensions have been manifested especially in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The African reaction to the war was fractured, as demonstrated by the vote by the United Nations General Assembly. Some states strongly criticised the acts of Russia, whereas others either abstained or took the stand of Russia (Ryder & Kebret, 2022). Such different positions indicate national interests and geopolitical orientations, yet they indicate a failure to coordinate on a continental level as well. Lack of coordinated African stand on a global crisis highlights the setbacks that will be faced in charting a common model of foreign policy under external pressure and internal weaknesses.

Western governments reacted to the seeming neutrality of Africa by exerting both political and economic pressures. Some leaders of African countries were documented to have been warned in person about how they were going to vote in the UN General Assembly; others were reportedly threatened with reductions in financial assistance if they voted in favour of Russia. Conversely, Russia has employed strategic diplomacy, using food and security aid, by releasing wheat dispatches, sending fertilisers, and signing weapons pacts with some African countries, as instruments of influence (Mavhunga, 2024; Ramani, 2024). In the meantime, China followed a more subtle but thoroughly rooted strategy, which involves long-term investment in African economies and strategic infrastructure development via the Belt and Road Initiative.

The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is still influencing the external relations of Africa by giving it billions of dollars in loans

to develop major infrastructure projects such as railroads, ports, highways, and energy platforms. Although such investments have closed vital developmental gaps, their presence has raised the issue of debt sustainability, contract opaqueness, and the sustainability of strategic asset control (Himmer & Rod, 2022). As in Zambia and Kenya, the domestic political stakes of foreign dependence have become a hot topic of discussion in terms of Chinese participation in national infrastructure development (Carmody, 2020).

Responding to this, Western actors have re-oriented their approach to the continent based on so-called democratic partnerships and values-based diplomacy. Although these frameworks are presented in liberal terms of governance reform and mutual respect, they mostly come with political terms that infringe on the freedom of independent policy formulation of recipient countries.

The failure to have permanent representation by Africa in the United Nations Security Council is one of the best representations of marginalisation of the continent in the decision-making process of the world. In addition, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which are known as financial institutions, implement significant control over the domestic economic policy because the conditions of the loans that they offer are strict (Gemechu, 2024). These asymmetries diminish the bargaining power of Africa and increase the structural dependency of Africa on external powers.

The spread of foreign military bases, especially in Djibouti, the Sahel, and the Horn of Africa, is only a testament to the role that Africa has become a strategic theatre for the major powers (Onor, 2023; Devocioğlu, 2024). There has been an increase in the number of arms sales, security arrangements and counterterrorist alliances, which have often been of interest to the security interests of non-local players rather than the long-term security interests of African communities. Furthermore, the emergence of BRICS as an alternative to the Western economic alliance has brought about tensions in political alliances in the international system. South Africa has now been joined by Ethiopia

and Egypt as members of BRICS. Other African countries are also participating in the BRICS Summit. This participation is highly opposed by the United States, with its President Donald Trump threatening to impose higher tariffs on participants of BRICS (Chia & Jordan, 2025).

The advantages of a temporary alliance with one of the powerful blocs might be the monetary or political benefits in the short term, yet, in the long term, such benefits come with a cost of freedom, stability, and integrity. On the other hand, non-commitment or neutrality may act as a stimulus to retaliation, marginalisation, or isolation. In order to traverse this tricky terrain, African countries have to pursue a purposeful, coherent and strategic foreign policy. This is achieved through participating with all the major powers without being subdued by the outside forces, protecting national development interests, and reinforcing continental unity.

Crafting a Coordinated African Non-Alignment Strategy

African countries need to be strategic in their foreign policy by being deliberate and coordinated in their dealings with major world powers. This involves interaction with all the great powers without being dominated. The protection of the national development interests and enhanced continental solidarity must be a top priority for African states. Here, the readjusted non-alignment policy with the main cornerstones of African solidarity, institutional strength, and transparent diplomatic posture, provides an alternative way out. Nevertheless, this goal should be well planned, institutionally enabled, and actively presented to be effective in the present-day global environment.

One serious flaw with the foreign policy positions of Africa today is that it is receptive. All too frequently, the response to global developments by member states lacks anticipatory and coordinated positions. The initiative-taking perspective on non-alignment necessitates that the AU should embark on high-level political consultations on important developments in the international arena. The

culmination of such discussions should result in mutual communiqués, concerted voting policies in the United Nations and other multilateral institutions and well-articulated parameters at the formation of negotiation frameworks to facilitate bilateral and multilateral endeavours.

Other important role players in the operationalisation of non-alignment are the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). In this light, as sub-regional centres of integration and diplomacy, RECs like the ECOWAS, SADC, EAC, and IGAD are supposed to harmonise their training programmes, their foreign policy orientations, and their mechanisms of early warning systems, with the continental non-alignment agenda. Regionalisation through RECs can become a central axis, as it is crucial towards harmonisation of policies, which will ease policy fragmentation and function as a central axis of Africa's negotiating capacity at the continental level.

It is a strategic necessity to generate the institutional and human capacity to continue the non-alignment. Most African foreign ministries are poorly staffed and are unable to analyse and support complex diplomatic negotiations using computer technologies and other analytical tools. Diplomacy training and policy research should thus be urgently invested in. A continental diplomatic academy that may be nucleated and run by the AU or in conjunction with the Pan-African Parliament can give focused training on the art of negotiation, conflict resolution, international law, and geopolitical analysis. These projects would not only enhance the capacity of the state but also harmonise policies in the African diplomatic services.

The architecture of non-alignment should also be suitably integrated with public diplomacy. African governments need to inform their domestic constituencies about the purpose, value and rationale of non-alignment. Using non-alignment as a strategic position, rather than a sign of indecision or a noncommittal position, is also critical to forming popular opinion. The inclusion of civil society organisations, academic institutions and the media in foreign policy decision-making would enhance the democratisation of decision-

making as well as legitimise the international stand of Africans.

Moreover, the non-alignment policy of Africa must be grounded on enlarged South-South co-operation. The alliances with other never-aligned or middle-power nations (such as India, Brazil, Indonesia, and Malaysia) could provide fruitful diplomatic assistance, commercial activity, and common venues in international regulatory agencies. The relationships have the potential to design a new era of reduced reliance by Africa on conventional donor nations, unlock the door to other development funding options and enforce greater demands on the international order, being more equitable.

Since the rate at which international relations are taking place has increased, the application of digital tools in Africa is necessary to prepare foreign policy in real time. One of the options that AU needs to consider is to create a secure digital platform of diplomacy that can help share information, write common policies, and develop rapid responses as issues arise. This would improve how Africa can facilitate international narratives and become responsive to the changing and emerging geopolitical trends.

After all, non-alignment cannot forever remain an epitome of rhetoric. It should be built on a well-designed policy tool, institute cooperation, and quantitative goal setting. It must include peace diplomacy, diversification of the economy, control of technology and greater integration between regions. Integrating the ideals of non-alignment into the frameworks that already exist, such as the Agenda 2063 or the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), will make sure that external engagements in the region are linked to long-term developmental goals of the region.

Conclusion

The changing trends of world power have left Africa at a very decisive point in its foreign policy course. Since global influence is being contested once again by big powers, African states are being faced with even more important decisions that come with serious political, economic, and strategic consequences. Non-alignment is a

bold but risky strategy for African nations, as it can lead to economic retaliation, diplomatic isolation, and expose divisions among states with differing foreign dependencies and interests. To succeed, non-alignment must be a well-coordinated, strategic policy backed by strong institutions, risk management tools like economic diversification and regional integration, and clear communication to avoid perceptions of weakness or indecisiveness. The principle of non-alignment provides an organised framework in which African nations can interact with all the key players in the world on equal grounds without necessarily getting involved in the rivalries that do not augur well for them. Nevertheless, to make this method productive, it has to be specifically planned, systematised on the continental scale, and based on powerful institutions that can react to the exigencies of modern geopolitics. Clear responsibilities, policy tools, and resource allocation should be assigned to the AU, its Peace and Security Council, and Regional Economic Communities to operationalise non-alignment effectively. The renewed and consistent non-alignment approach should also align with the long-term vision of Africa, especially through Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It necessitates a transition to more comprehensive, proactive, and principled diplomacy, which is the role of the African Union and the support granted by Regional Economic Communities.

Recommendations

1. The African Union should prioritise consultations amongst its member states and clearly define responsibilities at the AU, REC, and national levels to implement a coordinated non-alignment strategy. This strategy should include guidelines for foreign engagement, specifying how each level contributes to decision-making and actions at the United Nations General Assembly and other international gatherings, ensuring a more effective multilevel approach than during the Cold War.
2. The diplomatic training programmes, strategic communiqués and early warning systems of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) should be harmonised to enable them to work towards a continental non-aligned stance. Regular coordination between RECs and the AU should specify roles and responsibilities at each level, ensuring that the continental non-aligned stance is implemented effectively across RECs and national governments.
3. In order to minimise the exposure to economic coercion, African states are supposed to diversify their trading partners, expand their intra-African trade under AfCFTA, and focus on local value chains.
4. The AU should utilise African experts, scholars, and former diplomats to undertake policy analysis, carry out scenario planning, and issue early warnings on global developments. This organisation has the potential to facilitate evidence-based diplomacy and normalise the responses.
5. Efforts must be made to strengthen the relationship between Africa and the rest of the non-aligned and developing economies, such as India, Indonesia, Brazil, and Malaysia. This will enable them to share experience, enhance multilateral standings, and develop projects together.
6. AU should create a safe digital hub through which the African foreign ministries are able to coordinate with each other in real-time. This platform should clearly assign roles and responsibilities at each level, ensuring a coordinated and timely response to global developments and enhancing the effectiveness of a multilevel non-alignment foreign policy.

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