Peace & Security Council Report

Special edition
AU is committed to a better 2024
2023 a tough year in rear-view

Throughout 2023, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) focused on its mandate of solving the continent’s most pressing peace, security and governance challenges. In so doing, it convened at least 96 meetings, including 15 through its Committee of Experts. Of these, 28 debated crises and countries in transition, with the remainder dedicated to thematic issues and statutory activities, including retreats, field visits and joint consultations.

The number of crises discussed in 2023 dropped from 2022, when 32 crisis-centred meetings were held. This signified a year in which Africa’s peace and security landscape remained precarious with an obvious lack of commensurate response from regional and continental policy actors. The question is whether the Council achieved what was expected of it in these meetings.

Peace and security outlook

A confluence of threats posed challenges to peace, security, stability and socio-economic development in Africa. Key among them were the outbreak of new conflicts in Sudan, the rise in violent extremism, elections-related disputes and contested legitimacy of various regimes.

In the wake of successive military coups in the Sahel, political violence levels increased in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Democratic backsliding continued, visible in the resurgence of military coups in Niger and Gabon, the adoption of a new constitution that removed term limits in the Central African Republic (CAR) and contested electoral outcomes in Zimbabwe. Protracted political transitions persist despite the PSC informally consulting with affected countries. Deepening democratic and governance deficits undergirded these threats.

Acronyms and abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
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<tr>
<td>AGA</td>
<td>African Governance Architecture</td>
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<td>NAP</td>
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The year also saw major changes in the deployment of peacekeeping operations. Calls were made for the withdrawal of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping forces from Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). There were demands, too, for drawdowns of African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) troops, with significant consequences and increased risks to peace and security.

To address these issues, the PSC met at least 96 times (charts 1 and 2), mostly at ambassadorial level, but also involving the Committee of Experts and ministers. Twenty-eight meetings discussed 13 country- and region-specific cases (Chart 3). Compared to 32 meetings in 2022, during which 16 countries were discussed, the number of cases discussed by the Council in 2023 dropped by 13%.

Chart 1: Distribution of PSC meetings and activities in 2023

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<th>Month</th>
<th>Heads of State and Government</th>
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PSC in 2023

As is evident from Chart 3, the most discussed conflict was Sudan, which was tabled seven times by the Council. Despite the deteriorating situation in the Sahel, the Council had only one dedicated session on it, down from five in 2022. However, it discussed Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea, together with Sudan, in its consideration of countries in transition and undertook a field mission to Burkina Faso (July).

There were no dedicated sessions on Chad, Cameroon or Mozambique, raising questions about the priorities of Council chairs. Fewer discussions on CAR, DRC, Horn of Africa, Sahel, Somalia and South Sudan are concerning.

Responsibility for this outlook does not rest solely with the PSC. It reveals existing deficiencies in the AU’s peace, security and governance architectures, which remain ill-suited to deal with the complexity of conflicts dogging the continent.
More positively, situations in Ethiopia, Libya and Sudan received more attention than in 2022. This reinforces observations that the composition of the Council affects how it prioritises engagements on country conflicts with adverse consequences.

Overall, thirty-four thematic meetings were held, indicating a greater focus on thematic issues than on sensitive country situations, a trend that started in 2015.

Given Africa’s dire realities, themes included humanitarian action, governance, peace and security; displacement from ongoing conflicts, African Union (AU) sanctions, financing AU peace support operations, and children affected by armed conflict. However, the continued preference for discussing thematic issues while avoiding crises has harmful implications for the PSC’s influence on the continent’s peace and security outlook.

Avoiding ‘sensitive’ issues portrays the Council as overwhelmed by its mandate to prevent conflicts. Commitment to silencing the guns requires a Council that is bold and systematic in confronting conflict head-on.

During 2023, Council members undertook missions to South Sudan (February), DRC (March), Chad (Panel of the Wise in May), Somalia (Military Staff Committee in June) and Burkina Faso (July). Field missions planned to Mekelle, the capital of Ethiopia’s Tigray region (February), were postponed.

Despite the visit to the Abyei administrative area scheduled for May, the Council did not consider it seriously. The planned visit to Libya in October was disrupted by devastating floods that struck the eastern region in September. In July, the visit to Guinea Bissau was postponed as the Russia-Africa summit was held that month.

With the numerous challenges to continental peace, the deferred field missions could have offered greater Council presence in places where its decisions are required.

In 2024, the Council should revisit its 2007 decision on the use of field missions and explore how to conduct more in response to complex transitions and in areas needing preventive diplomatic interventions. It might also be useful for it to focus strategically on fewer priorities in 2024 and achieve more concrete outcomes.

**Tough but noteworthy year**

The Council’s impact in 2023 remained limited by a lack of coherence between AU and regional economic community approaches to crises, influenced by differences in applying ‘subsidiarity’. The lack of clarity on whether the PSC or the Economic Community of West African States would lead the response to the Niger coup is a clear example. In Sudan, the PSC deferred responsibility for addressing the conflict to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, remaining largely invisible in efforts to end the war.
Progress was also hampered by resistance from member states. Before the coups in Niger (2023) and Sudan (2021), the deposed governments had been made aware of, but dismissed, the warning signs. This resistance failed to adopt early corrective action.

In 2023, the Council continued to react to conflicts rather than anticipate and prevent them.

The Council, despite emphasising the need to address the root causes and drivers of armed conflict, did not deploy preventive diplomacy to its full potential. It was muted as President Faustin-Archange Touadéra manipulated CAR’s constitution for his term extension. In 2023, therefore, the Council continued to react to conflicts rather than anticipate and prevent them.

Obstacles notwithstanding, the Council’s efforts to promote peace and security were noteworthy. The PSC suspended Niger and Gabon from all AU activities, despite a delay in the former. The Council’s commitment to sustaining gains of recent years prompted it to approve the Somali government request to pause the drawdown of 3 000 ATMIS troops in September. This was despite an obvious snub of the Council by Somali leaders in their dealings with the UN.

To enhance its sanctions regime, it finalised and adopted its draft terms of reference to establish the PSC sub-committee on sanctions at its November retreat in Tunis. Ambassadorial adoption and committee establishment should improve the AU’s sanctions structure and its application during unconstitutional changes of government (UCGs).

The PSC also requested the AU Commission to review the African Peace and Security Architecture to adapt it to contemporary security challenges. This review presents an opportunity to centre preventive diplomacy in its response. It will involve assessing its existing instruments, particularly those related to diplomacy, governance and subsidiarity.

That said, incoming PSC members to be elected in early 2024 will inherit a tough agenda. To tackle the continent’s worsening peace, security and governance outlook and make a difference, they must learn from the weaknesses of the current Council and expend greater political will.
Time for the Council to tick the ballot box?

In line with its mandate as the primary organ preventing, managing and resolving conflicts on the continent, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) considered and deliberated on several situations during 2023. Chief among them were the July and August 2023 UCGs in Niger and Gabon.

Unlike in previous years, Council deliberations were tense due to the issues addressed and the divergence of national and regional positions. Particularly notable were matters emerging from the military takeover in Niger, which split the Council along regional lines. Consequently, voting as a means of deciding outcomes was broached. While some policymakers did not welcome the idea, others mentioned that it could lead to swift and more robust decisions.

The Council has been reluctant to vote, fearing the risk of fragmentation. However, the ballot is a statutory decision-making mechanism that shouldn’t be ruled out from the PSC’s options for prompt decision-making, especially in situations of intense divergence of national/regional positions. In the current volatile context in Africa, where rapid resolutions are needed, should the Council consider voting to overcome tensions?

Decision-making norms

PSC Protocol Article 8(12) states that PSC decision-making is primarily by consensus. Where this is not possible, decisions on procedural matters may be taken by a simple majority and those on all other matters by a two-thirds majority vote of PSC members. By applying this, the Council has consistently made decisions through consensus since its inception in 2004. Member states constantly lobby peers to back their stances. This has been the basis for the Council’s more than 1,184 consensus-based outcomes.

The consensus-based approach has been challenging, particularly as the AU Constitutive Act and PSC Protocol provide little guidance on its implementation or on voting when necessary. Although the PSC has stepped up the development of working methods to improve decision-making, the status quo remains. Furthermore, in the case of a stalemate, it’s unclear whether the process of voting is time-bound. Consequently, deliberations are often prolonged and the resulting consensus is not necessarily the most useful outcome for the Council.

Against this backdrop, the debate on voting is gradually gaining weight in certain AU policy circles and among experts, as many find voting important for making swift and impactful decisions. Some argue that the Council’s reluctance should be no reason for member states to fear ballots, given that voting could accelerate decision-making and bring smoothness and transparency to its decisions.

While both voting and consensus-based decision-making do not necessarily exclude lobbying, over-reliance on consensus in cases of intense divisions and sensitivities could lead to decisions driven by minority interests. Some experts suggest that voting could produce similar outcomes.

Voting could accelerate decision-making and bring transparency to PSC decisions

However, such arguments remain essentially speculative, as empirical data from PSC practice is lacking to confirm or refute such a claim. Voting might not be a panacea but Council decisions and dynamics in 2023 made the need to consider it indispensable.

Need for voting

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) push for endorsement of its decisions in the PSC in the case of Niger met resistance from other Council members. West Africa’s Council members – Ghana, the Gambia, Senegal and Nigeria – advocated blanket sanctions against Niger’s de facto authorities, suspension of the country and deployment of troops to restore constitutional order.

Other members, mainly from Southern Africa, notably South Africa and Namibia, opposed West Africa’s demand. After prolonged debates and intense lobbying to reach consensus, the Council dragged its feet before suspending Niger from the AU approximately three weeks after the coup occurred.
This indicates the PSC’s emerging behaviour away from its principled norm of swift suspension of countries contravening the Lomé Declaration against UCGs.

Similarly, high on the PSC agenda in 2023 were sanctions against UCGs. In May 2023, the draft framework on sanctions was examined in Zanzibar, Tanzania. However, differences in states’ positions on some aspects – which could have been decided by voting – delayed the process by several months. The draft was eventually adopted in Tunis in November 2023. If it had been put to the vote, adoption may have been faster, as most states had no concerns about the draft.

After protracted debates and lobbying to reach consensus, the PSC dragged its feet before suspending Niger from the AU three weeks after the coup occurred.

A major issue that could call for voting is North Africa’s rising interest in claiming its third Council seat. Current thinking in some policy circles is that ECOWAS could relinquish its fourth seat to North Africa. Certain Council members from southern Africa deem this fair, as it aligns with the AU Constitutive Act and PSC Protocol principle of equal representation. ECOWAS, however, maintains that Council representation should be proportional, based on the number of countries in regional blocs.

Another option is increasing the Council’s seats from 15 to 17. One of the additional seats would go to North Africa, while the second would be a floating seat to be rotated among other Council members, excluding ECOWAS members. ECOWAS is opposed to its mooted exclusion from the rotation.

Even though the Council has not officially addressed the issue, interviews with PSC Report reveal tensions in discussions behind the scenes. It is unlikely that the Council will reach consensus without voting on this issue. Otherwise, talks could be protracted, have no tangible results and create rifts within the Council.

**Implications**

While the Council has made strides with consensus-based decision-making, it is time for flexibility in considering voting when there is a clear lack of consensus. This would align with the PSC Protocol and help overcome delays in reaching conclusions and resolve tensions that could threaten the cordial regional and bilateral relations necessary for a strong Council. To further refine its working methods, the PSC should also consider establishing contexts and timeframes that should automatically trigger voting.
Choppy waters ahead as states vie for African Union chairship

The 37th ordinary session of the African Union (AU) Assembly, scheduled for 17 to 18 February 2024, will bring together Africa’s heads of state and government. A key outcome of the summit will be the election of the AU chair for 2024/25. The current chair, Comoros, is expected to hand over the reins to a new member state capable of leading the organisation amid complex and shifting global headwinds.

Based on the AU Constitutive Act and principles of equal representation, the chairship rotates annually across Africa’s five regions. Given that Comoros (east), Senegal (west), Democratic Republic of Congo (central) and South Africa (south) have chaired the last four times, a North African state is poised to take over in 2024.

Rising interest and competition should enhance the quality and merit of the chair. However, delays and contestations have often had the opposite effect. Internal regional struggles have complicated and prolonged the election, adversely affecting the incoming chair. A lack of regional solidarity and support at times has also hampered the chair’s ability to lead on thematic and country issues. Ahead of the 2024 summit, it is essential to understand these challenges and outline their implications.

Lack of regional consensus

Comoros’ AU chairship followed a contested process. It was the first appointment of an island state and robust discussions and debates occurred around Moroni’s capacity. Before, during and after the 36th ordinary session, several doubts were raised about its capacity to address the peace, security and governance challenges plaguing the continent. The question of whether size matters lingered over Comoros’ chairship.

Concerns about capacity and impact pointed to diverging positions and views within the AU Assembly, particularly the East African region. Before the 36th summit, a tug-of-war unfolded between Kenya and Comoros in a region that comprises 14 member states. As a result of the proliferated regional economic communities and mechanisms, there is no overarching framework to guide criteria and rotation of the chairship.

The contest culminated in success for Comoros. However, there was much debate about whether chairing should be purely procedural, with each state granted an opportunity, or whether the ‘big states’ with resources, drive and capacity should be frontrunners.

This contention is likely to be repeated before and during the 2024 summit as persistent rivalries also plague North Africa. The region will have to decide which of its seven members is best suited for the role. However, protracted feuds and conflicts over the status of Western Sahara will pit Algeria and Morocco against each other, with states lobbying for a leader that advances their interests.

North Africa’s previous rotation was in 2019, when Egypt took the helm. Morocco had been readmitted in 2017 and trod lightly to establish its presence and engagement with member states and the AU Commission. With six years of AU membership and having served a second consecutive term on the (PSC, Morocco is making a solid bid to head the AU for the first time. Algeria is doing likewise, also in a bid for a first win.

With Algeria and Morocco displaying similar resources, strength and capacity, regional consensus will be a major determinant in the outcome. If states are unable to agree on either country, a compromise must be found from one of the member states (Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Tunisia or Western Sahara). If this is not achieved, the position will have to rotate to another region, probably southern Africa. States from both north and southern Africa should be prepared to step in.

Reasons for regional struggles

Competition in East Africa and North Africa over AU leadership is not limited to national and regional interests, but extends to the advantages of the role. As outlined in AU Constitutive Act Article 6(4), the seat allows the elected state to preside over the continent’s trajectory. This comes with unusual prestige and visibility irrespective of the country’s size and capacity.

Member states view the tenure as increasingly strategic. The advantage may differ from one country to another, depending on the member state concerned. For big states, the position is often seen as an opportunity to further project power, as was the case for Egypt (2019/20) and South Africa (2020/21). For small states, it brings diplomatic clout, albeit for only 12 months. They seize the opportunity to voice concerns that are often neglected.
Comoros’ tenure, for example, was an opportunity to table island states’ concerns, such as rising sea level and the blue economy. The country hosted a ministerial meeting themed ‘Blue economy and climate action in Africa: islands and coastal states at the forefront’, which accelerated momentum on the issue. The yearly term has also afforded small states such as Congo (2006/07), Benin (2012/13) and Comoros (2023/24) worldwide recognition and diplomatic weight.

States’ eagerness to take over the seat has exacerbated regional fractures and divides, observably in East Africa and North Africa. Barriers to consensus include absence of a robust regional organisation in North Africa, lack of a hegemon such as Nigeria in West Africa and South Africa in southern Africa and profound antagonisms. For example, the longstanding feud between Morocco and Algeria is evident in the Western Sahara conflict.

Implications for the AU

As mentioned, the rotating chairship was instituted to foster member-state participation in driving African agency internally and multilaterally. It was also meant to reinforce the spirit of African brotherhood that guided the creation of the Organisation of African Unity and the AU. Yet, regional struggles have left the AU bureau limping since 2022.

Struggles between Kenya and Comoros deprived Senegal of a vice-chair and a similar scenario is likely to unfold with Algeria and Morocco. Policymakers interviewed by PSC Report affirmed the countries’ persisting diplomatic tensions over Western Sahara and the ambition of each to position itself as North Africa’s hegemon amid fierce competition for the chairship. Although sources claimed that the absence of a vice-chair had not affected Senegal, the country’s workload would have been more bearable with a fully constituted bureau.

Given that chairship is a learning process for states, especially those needing capacitation and support, the absence of a vice-chair such as Morocco or Algeria was a missed opportunity for Comoros during its chairship. Similarly, not having a deputy impeded the sustainable institutionalisation of the troika arrangement. This requires the presence of the precedent, outgoing and incoming chairs to preserve institutional memory and ensure continuity in managing continental affairs.

If Morocco and Algeria do not reach consensus during the 2024 summit, the AU Assembly will be hard-pressed to choose between two options. The first is passing the baton to other countries in the region, namely Egypt or Mauritania. The second would be for North African states to agree to hand over their turn to southern African to elect a chair.

The latter would be unprecedented since rotation began in 2003. Both scenarios demonstrate how state rivalries threaten continental integration and jeopardise the AU’s emergence as a more robust body. Given the risks for cohesion among states and dire implications for the AU, the organisation should referee contestations. Adopting a framework regulating the accession to AU chairship and guiding regional decision-making on candidates would be a big win in sustaining the statutory tenure.
Will an election equip the Council with strong states?

During the 45th executive council and 37th ordinary session of the AU Assembly, member states will elect 10 new countries to the PSC for two years. As the Council is the primary decision-making organ on peace and security, its efficacy in responding to the plethora of continental challenges depends significantly on the strength of its members.

The Council undertakes key roles and responsibilities to prevent, manage and ensure effective conflict resolution as outlined in the PSC Protocol. Article 3 mentions six major objectives spanning all stages of the peace spectrum, from prevention to post-conflict reconstruction and development. These objectives require the PSC to be well resourced and capacitated with technical knowledge and the political will to manage conflicts and promote peace on the continent. Its composition, given its influence in satisfying these three major requirements, is a major benchmark for understanding the direction, nature and robustness of the Council at any point in time.

Periodic renewal of Council membership based on its statutory rotation requirements is a key opportunity to bolster strength, refocus commitment amid difficulties and perceived ineffectiveness and reinvigorate efforts for a stable Africa. With all five regions experiencing onerous governance and security issues, the election of 10 countries – about two-thirds of the Council – should create a strong, efficient and robust body. But will it?

New contenders

The PSC election occurs every two years, with the upcoming event scheduled for February 2024 and new members starting their term on 1 April 2024. The PSC Protocol stipulates 15 members, 10 of whom are selected for two years and five for three years on rotation.

Chart 4: Current PSC members
The February election will end the terms of Burundi, Congo, Ghana, The Gambia, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Tunisia, which will exit in March 2024. However, protocol Article 5(3) decrees that member states may serve consecutive terms. Thus, current PSC members could apply for an additional term. Cameroon, Djibouti, Morocco, Namibia and Nigeria are serving three-year terms and can contest an election only in 2025.

Regional consensus dilutes competition and negatively affects the quality and outcomes of elections

African permanent missions had to submit applications to the PSC secretariat by 30 October and 13 November 2023 (for East Africa). Fourteen member states will contest the election (see Chart 5). Of the 10 incumbents, only Tanzania, Uganda and The Gambia have expressed interest in serving an additional two years, which, if granted, will provide the benefit of continuity on the Council.

The remaining seven seats are newcomers whose inclusion will bring fresh dynamics to Council composition and new ideas to be prioritised. Newcomers will need extensive training and capacity-building to develop concrete knowledge and understanding of current peace and security challenges and a grasp of evolving PSC dynamics.

The selection of new Council members ideally should be determined by the criteria in Article 5 of the PSC Protocol. These include member states’ respect for constitutional governance, their contribution to the Peace Fund/special fund and whether they have sufficiently staffed and equipped permanent missions at AU and United Nations headquarters.

Notwithstanding the extent to which current and incoming members meet the criteria, regional deliberations to decide on candidates are a major factor. They point to growing interest to serve in the PSC and to the strength and unity of regional blocs.

**Regional (dis)unity surfacing**

Prior regional consultations and deliberations have allowed the central, southern and western regional blocs to agree on and produce the required number of candidates for their available seats. Notwithstanding any last-minute changes, the DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Angola, Botswana, Côte d’Ivoire, Sierra Leone and The Gambia should serve as Council members from 2024 to 2026.

For North Africa and East Africa, however, a lack of regional consensus and strained bilateral relations among member states will render the election fiercely contested. In East Africa, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda and Tanzania will contend for two seats, while Algeria, Egypt and Mauritania will compete for a single North African seat.

Based on the protocol and given the responsibilities of the Council, these countries should consult regionally to determine which of their candidates meet the requirements for membership. This would help to ensure the inclusion of capacitated states capable of leadership and effective response to the continent’s peace and security challenges.
Delayed negotiations and consultations could lead to pre-election regional consensus in North Africa and East Africa. A trend in previous elections saw member states withdraw their application before the summit after finding common ground. This was the case between Kenya and Comoros in late 2022 on East Africa’s chairship of the AU in 2023. The coveted seat was contested for months before the election, but an eventual compromise was reached when Kenya capitulated to Comoros.

When smaller states are elected solely through the principle of regional rotation or consensus, their capacity and ability affect the PSC

Achieving regional consensus may prove even more difficult in North Africa given longstanding tensions around several issues, including western Sahara. Reaching an agreement with only one seat provided is an added challenge. A persistent matter over several years has been North Africa’s repeated call for an additional seat or more equal regional distribution of the 15 PSC seats.

During the previous summit, it was decided to establish a committee to investigate this further, devise options and report back to the executive council. However, it’s unlikely that this will be realised before the summit as the committee is yet to meet.

While achieving consensus on PSC candidates is beneficial, it dilutes competition and negatively affects the quality and outcomes of the process. When ‘smaller’ states are elected purely through the principle of regional rotation or consensus, their capacity and ability to meet roles and responsibilities affect the PSC.

Will the PSC fly or founder?

The new PSC members will serve until 2026. The strength and propensity of the Council to meet its responsibilities will depend primarily on the strengths and weaknesses of individual members. The inclusion of member states that do not meet the criteria will continue to hamper the PSC in substance and process. It will affect the programme of work and monthly agenda and will influence and shape its ability to respond to continental crises.

About half of the candidates vying to join the PSC in 2024 can be classified as ‘small states’ with limited diplomatic clout. In the absence of anchor states such as Ghana, Senegal and South Africa, who will drive the Council and what are the implications for AU response to peace and security challenges? Another question is whether the PSC Protocol should be revised whereby leading states with the requisite resources and political will are permanent Council members.
What opportunities does the New Agenda for Peace offer Africa?

The uptick in global conflict trends has become increasingly apparent. The 2023 Global Peace Index found that the average level of global peacefulness deteriorated by 0.42%, an estimated reduction of 13 times in the last 15 years. In 2022, even though peace improved in 84 countries, it significantly deteriorated in 79 others. Interconnected crises have become the basis for ongoing calls to resolve deepening present and future peace and security problems. Examples of such global interlocked crises are the Russia-Ukraine war, the violent extremist threat in the Sahel, instability in the Horn of Africa and, most recently, the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza.

The cracks in collective security are a result of a lack of trust, solidarity and universality

UN Secretary-General António Guterres’s policy brief on a New Agenda for Peace (NAP) is a promising avenue for managing global risks and threats. It draws attention to essential shifts in the multilateral system and calls for redress in containing the compounding effects of multiple crises. Given Africa’s central contribution to global peace and security and the scale and magnitude of threats on the continent, will NAP address its numerous challenges? And will African policymakers rise to meet the NAP goals?

NAP in context

NAP comprises one of 11 policy papers developed to frame the discussion during the Summit for the Future expected to take place in September 2024. At the summit, member states are expected to negotiate a new global pact for more effective and collective multilateral efforts to better meet current and future challenges. Lauding the summit as a ‘once-in-a-generation opportunity to reinvigorate global action, Guterres requested member states to recommit to fundamental universal principles and further develop the frameworks of multilateralism so they are fit for the future’.

NAP emphasises the increasing threat to peace and security emerging from risks and dangerous trends for which traditional forms of prevention, management and resolution are ill-suited. It highlights the need to strengthen international multilateral security cooperation to deliver peace as a global public good.

It then advances 12 proposals in five priority areas necessary to address insecurity globally, that are also pertinent to the African continent. These include global prevention focusing on strategic risks and geopolitical divisions, preventing conflict and violence and sustaining peace, and strengthening peace operations and ensuring peace enforcement. In addition, there is a need for novel approaches to peace and potential conflicts, and bolstering international governance.

Implications for Africa

The NAP has clear implications for Africa, a continent that disproportionately shares the burden of global insecurity. First, it recognises the peculiarities of Africa’s insecurity and exclusively mentions Africa and the AU. This is pertinent as African conflicts continue to dominate the UN Security Council (UNSC) agenda and the UN dedicates most of its peacekeeping human and financial resources to managing crises on the continent.

Secondly, African officials have acknowledged the ongoing need to alter the management of insecurity. Africa’s dire security calls for a real new approach that should question the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and its correlation with new destabilising factors. This is consistent with NAP’s aspiration for a strategy shift by creating the ‘new deal’, symbolising the required fundamental changes to achieve more successful multilateral action for peace.

Thirdly, though NAP is a document with a global geographic focus, it also puts forward recommendations for enhancing the peace and security efforts of the AU and its subregional counterparts. NAP recognises the unique roles of partners to lead ‘a new generation of peace enforcement missions and counter-terrorism operations’.

Reshaping paradigms and approaches

At its core, NAP is an assessment of global security followed by a set of proposals for remedial action. It underscores that the UN-centred collective security
mechanism fails to deliver peace as a global public good. NAP attributes the cracks in collective security to neglect of three major principles: trust, solidarity and universality.

NAP is an important opportunity to revitalise APSA. In July 2023, the PSC requested the AU Commission to review APSA. The intention was, among others, to adapt to Africa’s contemporary security challenges and develop an AU strategy to promote community responses to conflicts on the continent. The latter is aligned with NAP’s recommendation that member states and regional organisations develop cross-regional prevention strategies.

NAP further proposes boosting preventive diplomacy in an era of divisions and recommends that global diplomacy must both reinforce and be bolstered by regional frameworks that build cooperation among member states. These recommendations help generate momentum around an intra-African process that renews African states to a continental conflict prevention agenda.

This requires bold political measures and institutional transformation. Beyond reaffirming commitment to conflict prevention, genuine political will is needed to use AU early warning and response structures such as the Panel of the Wise.
NAP also recognises the pivotal role regional organisations play in peace enforcement. Its call to consider UN support requests for AU and subregional deployments offers the opportunity to resource peace efforts adequately. Such proposals are made considering the unique roles of African partners under the new generation of peace enforcement and counter-terrorism operations to address the proliferation of non-state armed groups and other interlocking threats.

**Takeaways for the PSC**

NAP and the summit may not be strictly binding processes with an enforcement mechanism. The former is also criticised for not being sufficiently innovative and for failing to devise clear and concrete measures and enforcement mechanisms to achieve objectives.

Yet, both offer a vital opportunity to ignite debates on global and regional collective security mechanisms. The AU must spearhead a regional process that galvanises African thoughts and reflections to feed into the summit. In the lead-up to the event/summit, the PSC could convene a dedicated session on Africa’s position in the negotiation, having called beforehand for expert papers and non-papers to generate discussions.

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In addition, before engaging with UN member states at the summit, the PSC should follow-up on the implementation of its decision for stocktaking, assessment and review of APSA, which are vital for calibrating requirements to address African insecurity.

The APSA review should include assessing the efficacy of operational approaches and working methods on conflict prevention – most notably on early warning – and its mediation capabilities. It’s equally important to consolidate institutional competencies and improve collaboration within and between the various organisations in conflict prevention. The new deal NAP seeks should be leveraged for better domestication and buy-in by member states at all levels.

APSA discussions should also clarify mechanisms for deploying peace support operations and interventions under articles 4(h) and 4(j) of the AU Constitutive Act. An important starting point is revisiting the decision-making process for mandating the African Standby Force (ASF) by establishing why member states are not authorising the framework for addressing insecurity. Considering the growing use of ad hoc security mechanisms, the AU must also explore and rationalise these mechanisms’ roles within the ASF framework.
AU has a solid foundation to build on, says Commissioner Adeoye

African Union Peace and Security Commissioner, His Excellency Bankole Adeoye, shared his views on the issues at hand.

Last year is said to have been among the continent’s most challenging. How did you see it?

In 2023, Africa faced a series of exceptional challenges, especially with the occurrence of UCGs in two member states, Niger and Gabon. There was also a significant escalation of hostilities in Sudan, with the Sudanese armed forces and the rapid support forces engaging in a full-blown conflict.

Instances of terrorism, radicalisation, violent extremism and transnational organised crime persisted. There were also several unsuccessful coup attempts and security breaches. These issues highlighted the importance of reaffirming the aspirations of Agenda 2063 – the Africa we want. They emphasised the need to revitalise the implementation of the African Governance Architecture (AGA) and the APSA.

Amid the growing number of challenges, the political will of the 55 member states in the AU remains unwavering. The AU Commission is committed to making 2024 a better year, although the task ahead is quite formidable.

Do you think governance deficits are receiving the necessary attention?

Peace dividends can be achieved only through efficient governance. This encompasses governance in all its aspects, including political, human rights, constitutional, economic management, corporate, political and socio-economic. It is crucial to approach these issues comprehensively. An urgent matter requiring attention is to prioritise the involvement of women and youth in shaping a revitalised Africa.

Instability has exacerbated governance concerns, resulting in unacceptable government transitions. At the same time, our continent demonstrates a growing ability to adapt, as evidenced by the 13 countries that conducted elections in 2023. In 2024, elections will be held in 12 to 15 countries, contingent on the restoration of democracy and constitutional order in nations previously suspended for UCGs.

Indeed, the importance of governance cannot be overstated when maintaining stability across the continent, as demonstrated by member states’ unwavering dedication to holding elections. Undoubtedly, elections alone cannot be the sole determinant of the calibre of governance. However, they do guarantee the presence of elected leaders and foster political inclusivity. Promoting peace and fostering cooperation will be top priorities for us.

What will be your major preoccupations in 2024 and why?

We will continue to focus on our priorities from 2021, particularly ensuring conflict prevention, mediation and early warning, without explicitly addressing specific challenges. We must also combat terrorism and violent extremism.

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The AU Commission is committed to a better 2024 despite the task being formidable.

An important focus will be on UN Security Council resolution 2719 (2023) on the funding of AU peace support operations. This will ensure that operations led by the AU, which have been authorised and mandated, can effectively address the spread of terrorism and violent extremism across the continent.

Our ability to successfully fulfil our mission relies on strong and mutually beneficial partnerships. Enhancing the institutions of local governance and public administration in member states is essential to promote democracy and good governance. The AU Commission cannot solely observe and monitor the elected leadership’s delivery and mandate. What is needed is visionary and inclusive leadership to bring about the renewal of Africa. Strong and mutually beneficial partnerships are crucial.
Addressing the crisis in Sudan is paramount, along with close monitoring of and active participation in the handover to the Somali security forces. Ensuring sustained progress in Lake Chad Basin and effective resolutions to the challenges in the Sahel necessitates collaboration with all parties involved, including women, youth and children to guarantee that no one is left behind.

The United Nations-AU partnership is integral to resolving continental peace and security challenges. How will you take forward resolution 2719?

It is crucial to activate the AU Peace Fund and guarantee that mechanisms such as FemWise and WiseYouth work successfully together under the Panel of the Wise umbrella. With the Peace Fund’s backing, we are making great progress in the Tigray peace process. We have signed a memorandum of understanding with Ethiopia to this end.

Capacity must be built at all levels, particularly within the AU Commission and the 12 to 15 countries in which the AU has a physical presence. Receiving strategic directions from the AU Assembly is crucial. We eagerly anticipate the 37th regular session of the assembly of heads of state and government in Addis Ababa in February 2024.

We have a solid foundation on which to build as we go forward. We can successfully fulfil the security objectives contained in Agenda 2063 by relying on expertise on the continent and learning from other countries’ best practices. We are delighted to work closely with the UN Office to the AU, UN agencies and other stakeholders to satisfy the objectives of resolution 2719. Collaboration, alignment and open lines of communication are essential for successful outcomes.

The PSC turns 20 in May this year. How do you view its role and delivery record?

The PSC is living up to its purpose, mandate and expectations of citizens and member states. Despite challenges, it has remained steadfast and formidable as the continent’s first responder in addressing peace, security, governance and, to an extent, sustainable development.

The PSC is also a champion for the implementation of AGA and APSA instruments and remains vociferous in condemning UCGs. In addition, its work methods are improving. It will continue partnering with the AU Commission to make the continent safe and anchored in democracy and good governance.

Some member states have called for a total review, but this will be factored into our reflections for the 20th anniversary. In my view, the PSC has delivered and will continue to do so to realise the aspirations of 2063.

What is the PSC’s most significant challenge?

Lack of adherence and disregard for its decisions, pronouncements and conclusions. This outcome is not due to any inherent flaw in the PSC but rather to inadequate and infrequent monitoring and evaluation of its decisions to enhance its effectiveness. The Council should also regularly
examine its defining instruments, with the AU’s peace and security architecture as the foundation.

As an illustration, the PSC protocol does not consider the possibility of not being a first responder. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that the Council faces the challenge of regional economic communities taking on this role in practice. Similarly, the PSC will need to address internal financial matters and external interference that can negatively affect it.

Should the PSC protocol be revised to envisage the regional economic communities as first responders?

The Council is unique in its solidarity, guided by the principle of finding ‘African solutions to African problems’. With a rich history spanning two decades, the PSC’s growth is evident in its confident and all-encompassing representation of the diverse regions and aspirations of the continent.

*Are sovereignty, complementarity and subsidiarity hampering the work of the Council? How will this be addressed?*

Regular consultations between the PSC and regional and multilateral bodies help to ensure that peace and security issues are thoroughly addressed. There are instances when the assertion of sovereignty can result in a denial of certain realities. Nevertheless, the Council possesses all the tools and resources to address peace and security concerns effectively, enabling the AU community to work together harmoniously.

Our delivery mechanisms are unparalleled compared to those of any other continent in the world. The PSC upholds the belief that Africa should be united and present a unified front on the global stage. Thus, as subsidiarity principles are embraced, it is crucial to demonstrate complementarity, consultation, coordination and communication. In 2024, the PSC needs to enhance its engagement with regional counterparts.

*Are calls for PSC reform warranted?*

AU member states will address this. And it will feature in our 20th-anniversary reflections. Some states have called for a holistic review while others want to expand the Council. Gaps have been identified and solutions proposed. Member states must unite and achieve consensus.
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The Peace and Security Council Report analyses developments and decisions at the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC). The monthly publication is the only one of its kind dedicated to providing current analysis of the PSC’s work. It is written by a team of ISS analysts in Addis Ababa.

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