Twenty-Two Years After: The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) in the face of shifting geopolitics and regional security dynamics[1]

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Abstract:

The principle of non-indifference arguably is the most invaluable dividend of African multilateralism in the 21st century. While on a conceptual level it steers the wheel of Agenda 2063, effective implementation of this initiative remains elusive. This paper attempts a performance critique of the overarching role of APSA in West Africa. Although the influence of former Colonial relations in African affairs still dominates extant literature, this article posits that of equal relevance is the emerging geopolitics of the region; a gradual shift from Colonial affiliations, to new alliances with Russia and China. Using data from secondary sources, the paper was able to establish that the recent coups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger reinforce fears of a Continent that is not only entangled in collective security dilemmas, but still reliant on external support to attain global relevance. The situation raises questions on the feasibility of an Afrocentric peace and development. There are also strategic concerns on the loss of confidence in the AU peace and security agenda by member States. The paper concludes with the recommendation that the APSA, beyond reviewing its operations, urgently needs to adapt to the new security demands and geopolitics of the region.

Introduction

Africa in the new millennium has been involved in activities reflective of its ambition to join the league of global powerhouses. Actualizing this vision requires collective, systemic actions that can enhance the security and socio-economic wellbeing of Africans (Bah et al., 2014). The bulk of these regional strategic initiatives get implemented concurrently being that they often share similar objectives, with some presenting indicators for measuring the others' performance as in the case of this paper. This article accesses the performance of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) using the socio-economic indices stipulated in Agenda 2063. Being the product of the Constitutive Act and statutorily implemented by the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), the APSA provides the institutional framework for administering the peace and security affairs of Member States in the various Regional Economic Communities (RECs) (Peace and Security Department, 2010). Hence, its efficacy is determined by the support and cooperation it receives from the RECs, and how the internal affairs of AU member countries are successfully administered using its progressive tenets.

Studies critiquing APSA emphasize majorly poor funding, inadequate logistical support and a weak cohesive synergy between the PSC, its supporting organs and the RECs, as major challenges constituting its operational set-backs (African Union, 2004; Williams, 2009; Debial, 2009; African Union, 2012). The upsurge in regional insecurity evidenced by transnational jihadi terrorism, banditry and the proliferation of arms equally feature as recurrent lapses that have become associated with the APSA (Okoli and Ogayi, 2018; Brenner, 2021; INTERPOL, 2018; Mbaezue, 2020; Chekol, 2019). Although these perspectives to the discourse stir relevant concerns that necessitate operational reviews and adjustments, there remains an intellectual gap that weakly explores the commitment of the PSC to issues of democracy and good governance within member states, as statutorily and normatively required by its Establishing Protocol. (PCRD, 2006; African Union, 2008). Since good governance is quintessential for peace and security, conversely it is the absence thereof that has become the root cause of the conflicts impeding socio-economic development in Africa. This aspect of the discourse is obscure in intellectual engagements and so demands further interrogation.

Africa's politico-economic problems, attendant security challenges, and possible links to the external influence of its erstwhile Colonial Administrators remain fiercely debated in literature (Umezuruike, 1979; Loxley, 1987; Gleditsch, 2003; Kingston et al., 2011). While there is sufficient empirical evidence supporting the various divides of this polemic (Havnevik, 1987; Osaghae, 1992; Adedeji, 1999), the common view is that foreign actors have benefited most from the insecurity in the region, even after the end of Colonialism (Dembele, 2005; Alabi, 2006; Maunganidze & Makoni, 2024). These informed notions was the basis for the establishment of the African Union and APSA in 2002, both driven by Pan-African reformative ideals that sought to consolidate on the gains of the anti-colonial struggles.

Two decades later, the Continent is again experiencing a shift in its geopolitical landscape, probably nurtured by the psychological vestiges of its Colonial history. Diplomatic relations with foreign powers are no longer influenced or inherited by Africans, as is the distinct feature of colonialism. They are now willingly forged. The coups in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger and their attendant implications for bi-lateral relations with France and Russia respectively, suggests a form of geopolitical revivalism. African countries, motivated by mutually beneficial military and socio-economic interests, are beginning to go into partnerships with the developed Economies of the East, untainted by Colonialism. This move is likely reactionary considering that the military juntas have cited poor governance, corruption, and the threat of transnational jihadi terrorism to their sovereign borders as justifications for their unconstitutional take-over of governments they consider Western puppets (Bojang Jnr, 2024).

According to Collin Powell in The African Report, "the growing unpopularity of the French, amplified by their excessive regional influence and inability to stem the spread of jihadist insurgents, also provide a scape goat for coup-makers" (Bojang Jnr, 2024, p.2). Introducing a pro-Western counter-narrative to the undercurrents of the coup, Powell further asserts that it was the glimmering opportunity presented by widespread frustrations over the failings of the military in the affected countries, and apprehension over the professional future of many career soldiers that led to the coups. In securitizing the French, the military junta presented the West as the problem, and they, the solution. As the West encounters growing resentment, rejection and hostility in its erstwhile colonies, Russia continues to take-over areas traditional considered "western strongholds" (Yarga, 2024); even as it gradually losses the socio-political, as well as moral high grounds in parts of Europe and the Middle East on account of its on-going military campaign in Ukraine.

While renewed ties between Africa and Russia seem progressive, the power imbalance between African countries and their new Superpower Counterpart(s) of the Eastern bloc is of key interest to the on-going discourse. Notwithstanding the change in foreign relations by the military junta in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, they are still largely dependent on Russia for military and economic support, including global relevance. It is no surprise therefore that the exploits of Russia's Wagner Group in the Sahel region has been emboldened by the invitations and welcome they have received from both State and non-State actors in Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and recently, Nigeria (during the End Bad Governance protest) to intervene in their domestic affairs. As with Russia on political and military affairs, so is it with China on the economic front. This is evidenced by the Asian giant's growing expansion of its economic interests and investments on African soil. According to the Central Bank of Egypt (2020), China's ambiguous loan agreements, compounded by her resource-for-infrastructure economic strategy in Africa have left some African countries in huge financial debts. For affected Countries like Mozambique, Angola and Zambia, the only hope of reducing their debt burden is to partially or totally cede their mineral resources to China. With by Her underdog status in bilateral engagements with the Super Power economies, Africa's

bargaining position remains arguably weak and significantly dependent. Dependency as a means to economic, military and political ends is a status symbol that runs antithetical to Agenda 2063 that envisions an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, built and driven by Africans.

Agenda 2063 and the roadmap for regional emergence

Agenda 2063 is a 50-year strategic policy framework for Africa's development (African Governance Report, 2019). Enacted in May 2013, it embodies the vision of transforming Africa to a formidable political and economic entity in the global arena. Articulated with Africa's peculiar's challenges in perspective after an 18-month consultation period, Agenda 2063 advances three goals for the region; integration, prosperity and peace (African Union, 2024). These new action points were not just mission replacements for the erstwhile apartheid and anti-colonial agenda of the AU Pan-Africanist Movement(s), they also represent policy shifts to initiatives that now prioritize the socio-economic growth of the Continent. A total of seven goals, termed aspirations were drawn from the three cardinal objectives of Agenda 2063. Each aspiration has accompanying indicators defining its purpose.

Aspiration 1: Inclusive growth and sustainable development

- Poverty eradication;
- Socio-economic transformation through a manufacturing culture;
- Value addition driven by science and technology;
- Utilizing the benefits of the blue and ocean economy to achieve Continental transformation;
- Mechanized agriculture

Aspiration 2: Continental Integration driven by the ideals of Pan-Africanism and African renaissance

- Enhancing mutually-beneficially links with Africans in the diaspora;
- Management of cross-border resources though dialogue;
- Building a world-class integrative infrastructure;
- Building seamless borders

Aspiration 3: Good governance, democracy, rule of law, justice

- Transformative leadership;
- Respect for the rule of law;
- Anti-corruption campaigns;
- Gender equality

Aspiration 4: A peaceful and secure Africa

- Defence of the region's collective security interests;
- An Africa free from armed conflict, terrorism, extremism and Gender Based Violence;
- Gender equality, inclusion and peace;
- Enshrined democratic principles

Aspiration 5: An Africa with a shared heritage and cultural identity

- Inclusion of African ideals and value systems in school curricula;
- Promotion of Africa's cultural assets (folklore, music, theater, literature, festivals, language);
- Use of African languages for the purposes of administration and integration;
- Campaigns for the safeguarding and repatriation of cultural artifacts and heritage

Aspiration 6: Development driven by Africans and their potentials

- Inclusivity for children, men and women regardless of gender, religion, ethnic and political affiliation, age and locality;
- Active participation in all aspects of decision making regarding developmental affairs;
- Empowerment of women and youths equipping them to face social challenges.

Aspiration 7: An Africa resilient, strong and influential on the global scene

- Equal participation in global affairs;
- A strong campaigner for a peaceful, tolerant, and just World;
- Reacquisition of the Continent's rightful share of the global commons (land, ocean and space);
- A capability to self-finance regional projects and programs.

The implementation of this policy is spread across five ten-year periods, with the first being from 2014-2023. While the objective of this paper is to critique the performance of the APSA on a continental level, it is also relevant that a brief nationalistic component to the discourse (using Nigeria) be introduced. This provides a balanced and in-depth overview of the implementation pitfalls of Agenda 2063, which in this context substitutes the APSA whose establishment though predates Agenda 2063, still shares identical goals. More so, the APSA peace and security agenda, steered by the AU principles of democracy and good governance are distilled in Agenda 2063.

Nigeria remains at the fore-front of regional endeavors to promote Africa. The challenges associated with its corrupt leadership however continue to stagnate her numerous potentials, eclipsing her positive influence as a regional Power. Consequent on the paucity of visionary and patriotic leadership, Aremu (2010) posits that the Country now contends with various forms of protracted structural and violent conflicts. The past nine years under the administrations of Presidents Muhammadu Buhari and Ahmed Bola Tinubu has seen Nigeria succumb to unprecedented economic travails with links to flailing security architecture. As a signatory to the Constitutive Act, APSA, and Agenda 2063, the performance of these administrations do not portray them as worthy envoys and the right assets for actualizing the Pan-African dream of Agenda 2063. If anything, the precedents they have set threaten the fragile peace in the Country, opening her up to exploitation by external foreign actors.

Under ex-President Buhari, Nigeria's macro-economic indices was at an all-time low. The country's inflation rate rose from 8.7% in 2015, to 22.22%; its GDP shrank from $594 billion, to $460 billion, and there was a burgeoning debt burden of N77 trillion by the end of his tenure in 2023 (Adonri, 2023). The exchange rate was also not spared this downward trajectory as it went from N197/USD and N220/USD in the black market, to N465/USD and N740/USD. These were the economic outcomes of the growing preference of foreign-made goods to the locally-manufactured ones, and Nigeria's strong import–dependent culture from mostly outside the Continent. Without prejudice to the doctrine of free trade, it is subject to debate that Nigeria's economic practices run contrary to the spirit of Aspirations 1 & 2 of Agenda 2063 that promote sustainable development, inclusive growth and resource trading in Africa. It is no surprise therefore that courtesy of these flawed economic policies, Nigeria in 2022 was named the "poverty capital of the World". The current administration of President Bola Tinubu has performed no better than his predecessor. His knee-jerk economic policies and their attendant social implications remain unpopular as they have further scourged an already bleeding economy. Among his most fiercely criticized politico-economic policies are; the abrupt removal of fuel subsidy without due economic consultations, floating of the Naira, his persistent fraternization with France, and the administration's serial loans from International monetary agencies that currently leaves the Country with a debt burden of N134.3 trillion ($91.3 billion).

The ripple effects of Nigeria's worsening economic situation also permeate the migration discourse. With youth unemployment at 42.5%, insecurity, lack of government support and the prevalent deplorable working conditions in many sectors (Ogbenika, 2019; Osigbesan, 2021; Inegbedion, 2022), Nigeria experienced its highest surge in brain drain between 2015 and 2023. Worst hit was the health sector that lost over 5000 medical doctors to the United Kingdom (Adebowale-Tambe, 2023). The "japa syndrome" as the brain drain phenomenon is popularly called in Nigeria, is not restricted to the health sector. Academics in tertiary institutions, financial experts, IT consultants and skilled artisans have also not been immune to the flurry of adverts and vacancies by foreign countries demanding their services abroad (Enibe, Umeh & Eze,

2021; Emeghara, 2013). Equally worrisome are not just the sectors that have been affected by the "japa" syndrome, but the bulk of the people leaving – youths. A report by Philips Consulting in Akingbolu (2022) revealed that 88% of the individuals who have left their jobs, with more still planning to do so, are the Gen Zs and millennials. Another study in 2018 shows that of the 35, 364 international students in the United States, 11, 000 were from Nigeria (Ogundare, 2018). The situation creates an ominous feeling considering that these are the same groups who in the vision of Agenda 2063 (Aspiration 6), represent Africa's prosperous future.

Perhaps the most colossal challenge resides with government-driven insecurity. This form of insecurity caused by bad government policies has manifested in different forms and with regional underpinnings. They include; political (electoral) violence, secessionist agitations, banditry, jihadist insurgency, highway abductions and community invasions.

Nigeria's political history is one replete with electoral malpractices orchestrated by not just its so-called independent electoral body - INEC, but also by gangs or political thugs. Political thuggery has been a distinct feature of elections in Nigeria and other African countries. Apropos, it has become the political conduit for perpetuating electoral vices like ballot-snatching, intimidation and vote-buying - the newest modus vivendi of Nigerian politics. In recognition of the potent threats political thugs constitute, the United Nations designated them non-State armed groups with political agenda (Carter Center, 2011; Dudouet, 2015). Like the military and State-sponsored militia, these armed non-State actors have the capabilities to bring any government down on its knees. They are the muscle and enforcers of corrupt politicians; and Nigeria's bulging (mostly unemployed) youth population keeps providing an endless supply of such vulnerable groups. It is plausible that the biggest threat political thugs constitute to good governance is not their use of organized violence to unleash mayhem, but rather, their role as tools or mechanisms for bringing un-deserving persons to power. In so doing they desecrate political offices and perpetuate the circle of bad governance. Political thugs are empowered by politicians, and they in turn empower politicians and their interests. This suggests that they are the biggest threat to good governance, democracy and the rule of law as encapsulated in Agenda 2063: Aspiration 3.

The other forms of insecurity do not embody the same strategic threat but they are no less dangerous. Their distinction lies in their threat to Nigeria's sovereignty. Regardless of regional peculiarities, the secessionist agitation in South-East Nigeria and the jihadist insurgency in North-East Nigeria bear similar features: - 1) they are both militant outcries against a Nigerian government that continues to enact anti-people policies. These agitations are along ethnic and religious lines respectively; 2) Boko Haram, the Islamic State, and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) all see secession or the creation of an independent State as the solution to Nigeria's governance issues that so far has been very corrupt and continues to enact policies that are not people-driven and inclusive; 3) the leaders of these proscribed groups – Nnamdi Kanu and late Mohammed Yusuf both suffered human rights abuses by the Nigerian justice system. Muhammed Yusuf was extra-judicially killed while in Police custody, and Nnamdi Kanu remains in

DSS detention contrary to the ruling of a High Court that granted him bail, and the provisions of Agenda 2063 on the rule of law and human rights being sacrosanct. The rights abuses on Kanu and Yusuf appear to have further escalated the activities of IPOB and ISWAP who are not only stepping up their operations, but are also forming transnational alliances with foreign terror groups – Al Qaeda, Islamic State (ISIS), and the Ambazonia Defence Forces (ADF) (Boudombo, 2021). Insights from Igwe (2023) also reveal that in 2019, the Global Terrorism Index ranked Nigeria 3rd in the World after Afghanistan and Iraq.

Lessons-learned from past Colonial struggles, and civil wars orchestrated by the shortfalls of African governments necessitated a new governance and security strategy. It was in the APSA and Agenda 2063 that the AU found normative and institutional modalities to meet this need. Nigeria is both a signatory to the APSA and Agenda 2063 Accords. Regrettably, the findings on Nigeria's political and socio-economic realities have shown a rather poor implementation of the goals of agenda 2063. With these evident implementation struggles of Agenda 2063 at the National level (with Nigeria as a case study), and given its inter-related and inter-dependent nature on the APSA, can the APSA succeed where Agenda 2063 is failing? What are the implications of this failure on the Continent?

The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA): National Impact and Regional Implications

The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) was inaugurated in 2002 in Durban, South Africa. This was following an AU reformative agenda that looked to consolidate on the gains of the anti-colonial struggles by charting the course for new socio-economic development built on enhanced security measures (Protocol relating to the establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, 2002). As an institutional mechanism against insecurity, the vision of the APSA is to enhance the lives of Africans by addressing violent conflicts and its effects on the socio-economic well-being of the Continent's citizenry. In terms of its normative embodiments, the APSA is portrayed as an elaborate doctrine that in detail specifies an agenda for peace and security through conflict prevention; early warning and preventive diplomacy; peacemaking and peacebuilding; encouragement and promotion of democratic practices; intervention; humanitarian action and disaster management (Bah et al., 2014). For effective operationalization of its mandate, the APSA has five supporting components, each of them saddled with specific responsibilities that reflect the goals of the APSA. They include; Panel of the Wise (PoW), Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), AU Commission, African Standby Force (ASF), and the Peace Fund.

In attempting to engage the question on the feasibility of the APSA succeeding where Agenda 2063 is failing, it is safe to argue that the structural/organisational and normative underpinnings of the APSA, significantly favor its chances. Unlike Agenda 2063 that exists mostly in principle, the APSA, though an AU policy framework as well, has a body statutorily mandated to implement and enforce its principles in member

states – The Peace and Security Council (PSC). The protocol establishing the PSC is what equally gives APSA the mandate to operate. The PSC which is Africa's equivalent of the UN Security Council (UNSC) comprises 15 AU member States - 10 members who are elected for a period of 2 years, and 5 members for 3 years. The protocol establishing the PSC requires that it maintains a presence and links with the various Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Mechanisms (RMs). From the foregoing, it is logical to assume that like Agenda 2063, the performance of APSA at the Continental level is dependent on the successful enforcement of its tenets within AU member States. This suggests that the Continent can only thrive when the various AU member States begin to experience the stability that comes with economic development in secured environments. The extent to which the APSA has utilized it strategic advantage over Agenda 2063, and in the implementation its vision, remains of policy interest. To this end, a baseline study was conducted in 2010 to assess the operations of the APSA since inception. How the results of that assessment have been utilized are evident going by the current security and socio-economic situation of the region.

Perspectives on the performance of the APSA since inception appear evenly divided. From a normative standpoint, the framework has been lauded for successfully setting-up the AU Border Program, AU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Corruption, New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. In terms of security and peace enforcement, the APSA has also recorded significant progress with the deployment of troops in 2007 for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). This is perceived as a demonstration of the strong synergy between the PSC and the ASF component of the APSA whose success so far has been attributed to a good blueprint that enables them operate with great coordination (Peace and Security Department, 2010).

Further, in living up to their early warning responsibilities, the APSA's Panel of the Wise (PoW) has been involved in election monitoring in countries like Chad, Central African Republic and Sudan, including mediating in election disputes. The PSC for its part is known to have convened various security meetings, reflecting its growing awareness of Africa's fast changing political and security landscape. Although Countries like Sudan, Central African Republic, Somalia and Mali are currently experiencing armed conflicts, the general security situation as projected in African Union (2016) is one of relative peace and a significant reduction in inter and intra state conflicts in Africa. This has equally been counted as the gains by the APSA.

The milestones achieved by the APSA through the PSC are not without significant drawbacks that typically characterize the operations of a regional entity. From a conceptual standpoint, the normative framework establishing the APSA has been described as elitist, neo-liberal and fundamentally deficient in encapsulating the reality of Africans (Obi 2014), hence its weakness in solving African problems. This postulation somehow lays credence to the rationale given by the military juntas in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger for intending to cease their membership of ECOWAS. Like the AU, they perceive ECOWAS to be under external influence as they have clearly stated:

*we are going to create an AES of the people, instead of an ECOWAS whose
directives and instructions are dictated to it by powers that are foreign to Africa…it
is up to us make the confederation alliance of Sahelian States an alternative to all
bogus regional groupings* (Rédaction Africanews, 2022).

Embedded in this statement is not just disenchantment with the institutional status quo,
but also an innate aspiration to have an accentuated outlook and relevance on
Continental affairs. This ambition shared by most African Countries, is however not
without enormous organisational complications to African multilateralism where
cohesive synergy at different levels, from the AU to the RECs, yet remains a struggle.
Cohesion and cooperation between the PSC, CEWs, and the PoW are vague due to
insufficient institutional support from the AU occasioned by the growing demand for
intervention at the various RECs (Peace and Security Department, 2010). Emerging
security challenges keep stretching the limited resources of the APSA and its
implementing components. The challenge with inadequate personnel may not be
distanced from the problems with staff recruitment at the AU. The modalities on
recruitment procedures as contained in the Maputo Structure limits staff membership to
strictly what the budget can accommodate, leaving no wiggle room for contingencies
during emergencies.

Still on synergy, poor coordination between the PSC, CEW and Civil Society
Organisations within member countries of the RECs was equally identified as a major
impediment to the PSC accessing vital security information and analysis that would have
enhanced the operations of the PSC in conflict prevention. On a horizontal level, similar
problem with cohesive synergy has been recorded among the RECs, a feature that makes
quick responses to regional security threats bureaucratic and difficult.

The APSA's biggest challenge may yet be domiciled in governance-related issues and
their attendant security challenges. It is a domain that bares the operational flaws of the
PoW with respect to matters requiring the enforcement of AU principles on democracy,
governance and the rule of law. The coups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger expose one
of such weakness as it shows the failure of the PoW and its corresponding organs in the
AU and ECOWAS to enforce the July 2000 Declaration prohibiting the unconstitutional
take-over of government (PSC Report, 2023). Further, while the coup in Niger was
jointly condemned by the PSC and AU Chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat, the political
chaos in Chad has been handled differently. This act is considered biased and
inconsistent, policy wise; with the tendency to bred despondency and a lack of
confidence in the operations of the PSC. In addition to the failings of the PoW with
regards to governance, the effective implementation of political transition processes in
Sudan and Central African Republic has also been criticized. Scenarios like this could
easily degenerate to anarchy and state collapse, courtesy of State and non-state actors
who might capitalize on the instability or vacuum in government to seize power.

Africa's most recent military coups are pointers to the preference of the military
approach in conflict resolution, to dialogue by AU member States. Beyond the

periphery, a closer look at this choice reveals an AU membership whose dispute resolution choices harbor reservations and a lack of confidence in APSA as an embodiment of a comprehensive dispute resolution mechanism. Worse, the dismantling of the early warning mechanisms of the APSA and their merging with corresponding partners in the RECs by the AU has further weakened the preventive and proactive capacity of the APSA to crisis, and by implication, the ability of the PoW to be preemptive. Such has the tendency to make the emergence of violent conflicts almost inevitable, while the PSC's role in conflict prevention becomes further weakened.

Although the security meetings convened by the PSC reflects high situation awareness of the security situation in the region, it is the operational capacity to be proactive in the face of impending crisis that truly reinforces the position of the PSC as the vanguard of African security. In validating this position further, concerns have been raised regarding the sufficiency of the provisions establishing APSA in dealing with emerging security challenges in the region, key among them, politically-induced insecurity and violence (African Union, 2002). Election monitoring and observation are quintessential to democratic norms. However if the sanctions that apply to errant political actors (if any) are not well enforced, the activities of the PSC and PoW with regards to election monitoring that safeguards democratic norms and values amounts to nothing but sabre rattling.

Conclusion

In the face of emerging geopolitics and security dynamics of the region, the APSA needs to maintain a high degree of validity and operational relevance that addresses the new regional security challenges and their political underpinnings. To this end, this paper which attempts to critique the operations of the APSA two decades after its inception recommends the following, that;

- The AU as a matter of priority should strictly enforce policies systemically requiring that the PSC, relevant organs of the AU, APSA, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) from the different RECs work together. Such cooperation at the agency, departmental, and regional levels guarantee the formation of a strong cohesive synergy among the APSA and its implementing partners. Formidable relationships like this will provide the PSC access to the goings-on in African countries. With this arrangement, CSOs can act as extensions of the PoW and PSC in their respective countries, monitoring and reporting on issues of electoral violence, human rights abuses, and unpopular government policies that could generate structural and violent conflicts at the national and regional levels;

- China's policies on bilateral defence, investments and trade agreements with most African countries has been enticing and largely considered favourable. Regardless, there are still valid concerns with respect to the implications of such bilateral engagements in terms of commensurate repayment plans in the area of loan servicing. Instances abound where the terms of agreement in cases of default

in repayments allows China to either acquire the mineral resources of the defaulting country, or to confiscate assets belonging to that country, anywhere in the world, as in the case of China and Nigeria in 2024. Avoiding such trade imbalances and their corresponding dire consequences demands that acquired loans should be channeled towards investments that will yield proceeds for not only servicing loans, but also developing the country. This is opposed to spending loans on recurrent expenditure and on the maintenance of the ostentatious life-style of some African politicians which contradicts the vision of Agenda 2063 and the APSA.

- There should be policies discouraging the AU and its member states from obtaining loans outside the shores of Africa to run African Affairs. The AU should work towards setting up dependable loan facilities and credit schemes that member states and RECs can access within Africa. The current practice of accessing loans or depending on external donor support from the EU and UN portrays the vision of an Afrocentric development and peace championed by the APSA and Agenda 2063 as nothing more than conceptual endeavors with no teeth and very minimal impact on security and the economy at the regional level. Also, the policies of ACFTA (African Continental Free Trade Agreement) should be reviewed to encourage and enforce more of intra-regional or continental trade habits or relations, than with foreign trade partners.

- Following the exponential rise in human rights abuses and election-related insecurity and malpractices in the region, the PSC through the PoW should devise statutorily-backed means of deterring such practices once confirmed to be true. They should influence and strictly enforce stiff penalties on errant member-countries with such records. Such punitive measures beyond deterrence also have the potential of shoring up the confidence of the citizenry with regards the enforcement capabilities of the APSA on matters of regional security, and its commitment to the principles of democracy and good governance.

- There is need to review the AU border program to reflect the current border security realities of the continent, mostly transnational in orientation. Efforts should be concentrated on the formation of civilian border security task forces, drawn from the border communities. Their existence and effective operations can significantly complement the role of the conventional border security outfits, particularly in the area of covering the large expanse of lands typically charactering African boundaries and borderlands.

- Policy formulation and enforcement by the AU should begin tilting towards being more value than interest-driven. It is the only way that the Pan-African spirit in which the APSA and Agenda 2063 were drawn up can be immortalised.

Notes on Contributor

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Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby declare that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

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