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Original Research

AFRICAN UNION PEACE AND SECURITY ARCHITECTURE (APSA): THE ROLE OF INTELLIGENCE IN CONFLICT PREVENTION

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ABSTRACT
The African Union's Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) examines the vital role intelligence plays in promoting conflict prevention. The study, which is based on the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), looks at how intelligence which includes gathering, analyzing, and disseminating information improves the African Union's ability to engage in proactive diplomacy, risk assessment, and early warning. By means of a qualitative examination of significant institutional mechanisms, such as the Panel of the Wise and the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the study explores the structural constraints and operational dynamics that impact the application of intelligence in preventing brutal conflict. Findings show enduring issues as such member state information asymmetry, political hesitancy, and disparities in intelligence capabilities. A growing institutional understanding of intelligence as a strategic asset for peacebuilding is also noted in the paper. By placing intelligence inside Africa's developing RSCT framework, this study promotes a more organized, institutionalized approach to intelligence sharing and presents fresh insights into regional security cooperation. The study adds to the body of knowledge regarding how to improve APSA's ability to provide prompt and preventive responses to Africa's complex security threats.

Keywords: African Union, African Standby Force, Conflict prevention, Continental Early warning System, Intelligence, Panel of wise, Peace Fund, Regional Security complex Theory (RSCT).

INTRODUCTION
Civil wars, insurgencies, transnational terrorism, and communal violence continue to threaten Africa, which is one of the world's most conflict-affected regions (Williams, 2021; Aning & Bah, 2021). These conflicts are underpinned by complex interplays of state fragility, ethnic and identity-based tensions, weak governance systems, and resource competition. Despite significant international and regional peacebuilding interventions over the past decades, many African states

continue to experience cyclical violence and political instability, which impede sustainable development and regional integration.

A comprehensive institutional structure designed to promote peace, security, and stability on the continent, the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) was created by the African Union (AU) in response to these recurrent crises. African-led responses to conflict, especially through early warning and preventive diplomacy, were made possible by APSA, which is made up of important pillars like the Peace and Security Council (PSC), Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), Panel of the Wise, African Standby Force (ASF), and Peace Fund (Murithi, 2022; Cilliers, 2008). However, timely and effective conflict prevention remains a challenge for the AU, especially with the normative and institutional growth of APSA.

The exclusion of strategic intelligence from APSA's conflict prevention responsibilities is one of its most overlooked yet serious flaws. Intelligence has historically been a national prerogative, defined as the methodical gathering, evaluating, and sharing of information to assist in security-related decision-making (Kasambala & Motsamai, 2024). But given the transboundary character of modern African conflicts which are characterized by porous borders, illegal arms flows, extremist networks, and shifting alliances a regional and continental intelligence strategy that transcends ad hoc coordination is required (Anning, 2020).

APSA's main conflict monitoring tool, the CEWS, primarily rely on situational reports from Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and open-source data. However, CEWS frequently finds it difficult to produce actionable early warnings or enable prompt actions due to limited analytical capabilities and lack of access to member states' classified intelligence (Choge-Nyangoro, 2020). The gap between conflict detection and political or operational intervention, commonly known as the "warning-response gap" (Williams, 2021), has been exacerbated by this. The lack of defined norms for intelligence sharing inside the AU system, institutional fragmentation, and political sensitivities about sovereignty all contribute to the situation (Adebajo, 2021).

To improve mission planning, threat assessment, and crisis management, international peace operations particularly those conducted by the United Nations (UN) have institutionalized intelligence support structures like All-Source Information Fusion Units (ASIFUs) and Joint Mission Analysis Centres (JMACs) more and more (UN DPKO, 2017; Karlsrud & Rosén, 2013). As it contemplates how to operationalize and formalize intelligence systems appropriate for its institutional limitations and regional political realities, the AU may learn a lot from these approaches.

With an emphasis on its function in conflict prevention, this paper critically examines how intelligence is conceptualized and integrated within APSA. It evaluates how intelligence or lack thereof has influenced the AU's capacity to foresee, avert, and respond to violent conflict, drawing on real case studies from South Sudan, Darfur/Sudan, Mali, Somalia, Mozambique and the Sahel. The study makes the case that reorienting intelligence from a supporting role to a key role in AU peace and security operations is essential to enhancing the credibility and efficacy of African-led conflict prevention. The analysis concludes with policy proposals meant to close the institutional,

technological, and political divide that presently prevents APSA from establishing a strong, intelligence-driven strategy.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS.

Peace Architecture:

The term "peace architecture" describes operational, legal, and institutional frameworks intended to manage crises, avoid war, and maintain peace. This framework is embodied in the African context by the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), which includes important mechanisms like the African Standby Force (ASF), the Panel of the Wise (PoW), the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), and the Peace Fund (Murithi, 2020). With an emphasis on proactive rather than reactive peace tactics, APSA is the cornerstone of conflict prevention and management.

The PSC serves as the primary decision-making body, with responsibilities that include mediation, conflict avoidance, and intervention authorization. The Panel of the Wise assists the PSC with preventive diplomacy and informal mediation. CEWS conducts threat assessments, data collection, and conflict monitoring to assist in decision-making. While the Peace Fund is meant to guarantee sufficient funding for APSA operations, the ASF is intended to be a military capability that can be deployed quickly.

Collectively, these institutional elements signify a normative change in African multilateralism from non-intervention to non-indifference, allowing for collective security measures such as preventative diplomacy and, if required, intervention (Namakula, 2021).

Intelligence and conflict prevention: Within this study's parameters, **intelligence** is defined as the gathering, evaluation, and prompt distribution of data to aid in decision-making, particularly in situations involving national and regional security. **Conflict prevention** refers to actions taken to foresee, lessen, or eradicate the reasons behind violent conflict before it escalates. Decision-makers are intended to be informed about early warning indicators and changing dangers by the incorporation of intelligence into peace designs, which will enable prompt interventions (Williams, 2021).

Within APSA, intelligence plays a unique and little-studied role as a governance enabler as well as a technical tool. When discussing intelligence in this context, it refers to the methodical gathering, evaluation, and sharing of data with the goal of enhancing APSA's capacity to prevent conflicts. While CEWS is physically built to carry out this intelligence function, institutional fragmentation and political dynamics limit its actual capacity (Noyes & Yarwood, 2013). CEWS is mandated to gather data from "Situation Rooms" at both continental and regional levels.

In order to further clarify concepts, intelligence in APSA needs to be defined in three ways: According to Bolaji (2014) and Noyes and Yarwood (2013), the structural dimension is concerned with institutional arrangements, namely how CEWS connects with the PSC, ASF, and Regional Economic Communities, as well as how intelligence flows vertically between APSA layers. The operational role of intelligence in APSA decision-making, risk analysis, and crisis detection

is the second functional dimension. It is anticipated that intelligence would bridge the "warning–response gap" in this case by translating early detection into operational and political action (Namakula, 2021).

The third dimension is political, which includes concerns about normative legitimacy, sovereignty, and trust that influence member states' readiness to exchange sensitive information. According to Appiah (2018), continental intelligence cooperation is still weakened by APSA's non-interference tradition.

The Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) and other comparative insights from UN peace operations provide useful sub-models for intelligence integration. The United Nations' JMAC, in contrast to APSA, institutionalizes intelligence at the strategic and operational levels, facilitating mission assistance and coordinated analysis (Ramjoué, 2011). This example demonstrates how multidisciplinary, integrated intelligence can be a force multiplier in conflict situations.

The relationship between APSA's architecture and intelligence is defined by this conceptual clarification, which concludes that intelligence should be viewed as a governance lever that can improve APSA's strategic, responsive, and anticipatory capabilities rather than as an auxiliary tool. It is necessary to reframe the main conflicts structural constraints, normative opposition, and political mistrust in a way that puts intelligence at the core of APSA's preventative diplomacy.

The African Union Peace Architecture and the Role of Intelligence in Conflict Prevention

Maintaining peace and security throughout the continent is based on the African Union's Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). African Standby Force, the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early Warning System, and the Peace and Security Council (PSC) are all essential components of APSA. The purpose of these bodies is to cooperatively foresee, avoid, and resolve problems. Scholarly discussion has shifted in recent years towards the incorporation of intelligence, especially artificial intelligence (AI), into these processes in order to improve their capacity to avert conflict.

Through data collection and analysis, the CEWS plays a crucial role in APSA by promptly alerting the agency to new dangers. However, issues include a lack of funds, a lack of personnel, and a lack of cooperation with other AU agencies, such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, have hindered its performance. The system has not been able to fully predict and avert conflicts because of this lack of synergy (ACCORD, 2023). Furthermore, because member states' concerns about sovereignty frequently drive its selective engagement and reactive response to conflicts, the PSC has come under fire (ISS Africa, 2023).

There is growing agreement that APSA needs to incorporate sophisticated intelligence techniques in order to address these issues. In order to improve data analysis and early warning capabilities, Osee (2024) makes the case for integrating AI into the CEWS. The ability of AI to evaluate enormous volumes of data from several sources makes it possible to identify minute signs of possible conflicts. For example, in Somalia, AI-powered tools have been used to forecast forced migration, enabling early humanitarian action (ACCORD, 2024). Likewise, Uganda has employed

AI-driven radio content analysis technologies to assess public opinion, supporting the strategic development of initiatives for the integration of refugees (Microsoft, 2024).

The potential of AI in preventing conflicts has been acknowledged by the PSC. In order to enable preventive actions, the PSC asked the AU Commission to support the adoption of AI-driven early warning systems to identify and evaluate possible conflict signs during its 1214th meeting, which took place on June 13, 2024 (ACCORD, 2024). This action highlights the trend of using technology to support peacekeeping missions.

The incorporation of AI into APSA is not without difficulties, though. It is necessary to handle ethical issues such data protection and misuse possibilities. In order to make a good impact on peace and security in Africa, Osee (2024) highlights the significance of using AI technology in an ethical and inclusive manner. Furthermore, the effective deployment of AI necessitates sufficient finance, technical know-how, and infrastructure areas in which the AU has traditionally struggled.

Furthermore, improved interaction with intelligence systems could maximize the Panel of the Wise's contribution to conflict avoidance. The Panel should be changed into a more dynamic "Pool of the Wise," with a wider variety of specialists who can offer prompt and well-informed interventions, according to Jegede (2023). To facilitate decision-making, such a shift would require stronger analytical capabilities and better information-sharing systems.

Finally, the integration of advanced intelligence technologies, especially artificial intelligence (AI), can greatly increase the efficiency of APSA in preventing conflicts, even if it has already developed a complete framework for peace and security. The ethical ramifications of this integration must be carefully considered, and the required infrastructure and knowledge must be available. To create a more proactive and adaptable peace architecture in Africa, it will be essential to embrace technology advancements and improve cooperation among APSA's many bodies.

Within APSA's conflict prevention procedures, empirical evidence highlights the limitations of intelligence capacities. Despite technology capabilities such as media monitoring and satellite data, CEWS analysis reveals that staff turnover, institutional inertia, and a lack of state cooperation limit its capacity to deliver actionable warnings (Noyes & Yarwood, 2013). One of the few successful empirically supported initiatives in West Africa is the WANEP–ECOWAS model, which tracks conflicts at the grassroots level and informs regional decision-making, but even this is limited in scope and resource availability (WANEP, n.d.).

A comparison of case studies demonstrates the intelligence gap in APSA. During the 2012 conflict in Mali, the ASF and APSA showed a lack of responsiveness, with disjointed intelligence flow and coordination issues causing action to be delayed (Arthur, 2017). On the other hand, UN missions that have integrated analysis centres were better able to predict the course of conflicts and formulate prompt responses (Ramjoué, 2011). Another example is the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram, which was hampered in threat assessment and intelligence pooling despite the threat's regional nature by interstate mistrust and insufficient data sharing (Marwala, 2024). Although there are no institutional procedures for systematic intelligence

collection, empirical research on liaison offices, like the AU Liaison Office in Madagascar, demonstrates that ad hoc on-the-ground intelligence can impact mediation (Marwala, 2023).

Even while APSA's institutional design has been extensively studied, formal intelligence integration into its peace and conflict prevention measures has received very little attention. In contrast to intelligence modalities, governance, sovereignty, and organizational design are the main topics of current theoretical debates. Instead of analyzing intelligence frameworks or the mechanisms behind prediction, attribution, and strategic action, empirical research typically assesses early warning outputs or specific mission reactions. Furthermore, although JMACs and other comparison models are mentioned, their structural significance for APSA reform is rarely thoroughly examined. By providing a theoretically and empirically informed analysis of intelligence's function within APSA, examining institutional, political, and technical barriers, and proposing reforms to Centre intelligence in African conflict prevention, this paper closes that gap.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

An effective analytical framework for comprehending regional security dynamics, including those pertinent to Africa and the peace and security architecture of the African Union, is offered by the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), which was first developed by Barry Buzan in 1983 and later developed by Ole Waever (most notably in Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security, 2003). A key contribution of the Copenhagen School of Security Studies, RSCT is based on the notion that security interdependence is highest among neighboring states because most security risks are more easily transmitted across short distances. Thus, groups of governments whose main security issues are so linked that their national security cannot be sensibly examined apart from one another are referred to as regional security complexes (RSCs) (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

Using RSCT, Africa may be presented as a continent made up of various regional security complexes, each with its own distinct power dynamics, conflict patterns, and threat perceptions, rather than as a single security area inside the framework of the African Union's Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The Sahel, the Horn of Africa, West Africa, and the Great Lakes region, for example, can all be considered separate RSCs with highly interconnected and primarily regional security issues.

The APSA's design clearly aligns with the RSCT's emphasis on the significance of regional solutions to regional issues. The AU wants to enable regional entities to identify, assess, and address dangers in their various RSCs through tools like the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs). In this sense, intelligence encompasses more than just gathering data; it also includes the methodical analysis of data that can guide early response plans in every regional complex.

Buzan and Waever (2003) contend that while outside forces can have an impact, they cannot radically change the dynamics of regional security. Instead of depending exclusively on outside actors, this realization emphasizes how crucial it is to develop African intelligence capacities internally in order to prevent conflicts. When effectively incorporated into the AU's

decision-making process, regional intelligence collection enables more timely and context-sensitive interventions, strengthening the AU's capacity to take action before crises worsen.

All things considered, RSCT offers a theoretical defense as well as a workable plan for enhancing the AU's involvement in preventing conflicts through regional intelligence systems. It supports the idea that African conflicts are best understood and handled within their own regional contexts, and that APSA's efficacy rests on its capacity to align regional intelligence flows with continental frameworks for decision-making (Buzan & Waever, 2003).

METHODOLOGY

Using a qualitative research approach with a descriptive and analytical focus, this paper looks at how intelligence functions within the African Union Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) in relation to preventing conflicts on the continent. To explore the complicated connections between intelligence collection, institutional mandates, and preventive diplomacy in Africa, a qualitative approach is suitable, considering the African Union's (AU) political, strategic, and institutional complexity as well as its conflict prevention mechanisms. In order to comprehend how intelligence is incorporated into peacebuilding structures, it is essential to examine policies, institutional frameworks, and inter-agency relationships in depth. These aspects are difficult to measure**.**

The paper mostly uses documentary analysis, with an emphasis on academic literature, institutional reports, policy frameworks, and official texts. The African Union Constitutive Act, the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (2002), the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) Roadmaps, the European Early Warning System (CEWS) operational reports, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) communiqués, and pertinent strategic documents of the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA) are among the key documents examined. The official functions, capabilities, and constraints of intelligence within the AU's preventive framework are authoritatively explained in these papers. Relevance, recentness, institutional legitimacy, and a clear link to the AU's conflict prevention program are the criteria used to choose the texts.

Additionally, a critical content examination of policy briefs, working papers, think tank publications, and peer-reviewed journal articles was carried out to increase the analysis's robustness. To guarantee the width and depth of viewpoints, precedence was given to sources from prestigious organizations including the United Nations (UN), African Union Commission (AUC), International Crisis Group (ICG), and Institute for Security Studies (ISS). For a thorough grasp of how intelligence has changed within APSA during the past 20 years, a focus on academic and policy-oriented works published between 2002 (the year of the PSC Protocol) and 2024 was made.

A technique of institutional and contextual analysis was applied to the data from various sources. Tracing the development of AU intelligence capabilities inside CEWS and CISSA, determining operational connections between early warning and early action, and analyzing the institutional coordination among the AU, RECs, and foreign players were all part of this. In particular, the topics of institutional coherence, intelligence accountability, information flow, and decision-making responsiveness are highlighted in the analytical framework, which is based on

institutional theory and security sector governance. Using these ideas, the AU framework evaluates how intelligence influences or does not influence intervention and preventative diplomacy tactics.

Finally, this paper complies with strict academic guidelines by guaranteeing the reliability, validity, and cross-referencing of all data sources. To validate interpretations, institutional papers are cross-referenced with scholarly literature, and only publicly available and verified data are used. Only open-source resources are used, avoiding classified or restricted data, in order to adhere to ethical considerations around the handling of sensitive security information. The scholarly integrity, transparency, and reproducibility of this methodology are thus guaranteed while investigating the crucial yet little-studied role of intelligence in the African Union's conflict prevention framework.

Historical Context of the African Union Peace Architecture

The African Union (AU), formed in 2002 as a successor to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), established APSA as a response to the continental burden of intra-state conflicts, civil wars, and coups. Unlike the OAU's policy of non-interference, the AU adopted a more interventionist stance grounded in Article 4(h) of its Constitutive Act, which permits intervention in member states in grave circumstances such as war crimes and genocide (AU Constitutive Act, 2000).

The implementation of APSA has evolved through institutional development, operational testing, and partnerships with Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and international actors. Nonetheless, operationalizing early warning and preventive mechanisms has faced several challenges, among which is the integration of intelligence into its conflict prevention architecture (Okumu, 2020).

A lengthy and tumultuous history of conflict, shoddy colonial legacies, and the inability of post-independence continental institutions to effectively handle violent crises gave rise to the African Union's (AU) Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). African leaders came together to form APSA because they realized that the Organization of African Unity's (OAU) traditional ideas of state sovereignty and non-interference were not appropriate for dealing with the rise in intra-state conflicts, genocides, and state collapse that marked the post-Cold War era (Murithi, 2009; Williams, 2011).

When the OAU was established in 1963, its top priorities were decolonization and sovereignty preservation over meddling in the domestic affairs of its member states. According to Cilliers and Sturman (2004), this strategy was crucial throughout the period of independence but became more troublesome in the 1990s when internal wars in nations such as Rwanda, Liberia, and Somalia exposed the organization's inertia in the face of enormous crimes. One pivotal event in particular was the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The OAU's and the international community's inability to stop or prevent the genocide prompted a reconsideration of Africa's peace and security strategy (Dersso, 2012). This change was made official by the AU's 2000 Constitutive Act, which gave the Union the authority to step in when member states committed crimes against humanity, genocide, or war crimes (African Union, 2000, Art. 4(h)).

APSA was created as an institutional and normative framework to handle conflict throughout the continent in light of this. It consists of a number of interconnected parts, such as the African Standby Force (ASF), the Panel of the Wise (PoW), the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the Peace Fund, and the Peace and Security Council (PSC) (Murithi, 2009). Early warning, quick deployment, and political mediation are key components of these institutions' collaborative approach to conflict prevention, management, and resolution.

This architecture incorporates intelligence, especially strategic early warning, mostly through CEWS, which was designed as a proactive way to gather, examine, and share information about possible conflicts. Though the success of CEWS has been restricted by low capacity, poor coordination among member nations, and the politicization of information-sharing, it does show a rising acknowledgement of the value of intelligence in conflict prevention (Bah, 2010; Van Eck, 2020). Furthermore, governments' unwillingness to divulge vital security information because of mistrust and worries about sovereignty keeps undermining the CEWS's capacity for prediction and prevention.

Over time, the architecture has changed to meet these difficulties. Through its experience mediating crises in the Central African Republic, Mali, and Darfur, the AU has improved its operations and gained a greater understanding of how reliable, up-to-date intelligence shapes preventive diplomacy and prompt action. Although worries about an excessive dependence on outside financing and expertise still exist, APSA has also been strengthened by collaborations with international donors, the United Nations, and regional economic communities (RECs) (Williams, 2011; De Coning et al., 2019).

The AU Peace Architecture, taken as a whole, marks a dramatic change from the OAU's passive posture to a security paradigm that is more interventionist and intelligence-driven. The APSA's historical development is indicative of the continent's efforts to balance the pressing demands of collective security with the demands of sovereignty. Comprehending this progression is crucial for evaluating the potential institutionalization of intelligence, both as strategic analysis and early warning, to enhance the AU's ability to prevent conflicts in the twenty-first century.

Exploring the Role of Intelligence in the AU Peace Architecture through the Lens of Regional Security Complex Theory.

The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) relies heavily on intelligence, but its role is not well understood, especially when it comes to early warning and conflict prevention. According to the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), intelligence is a strategic tool that mediates the regionally clustered structure of insecurity in Africa rather than just being a technical tool. According to RSCT, security is arranged into regionally specific complexes where actors' security is connected by historical links, geographic closeness, and transnational dangers (Buzan & Waever, 2003). This is especially true in Africa, where transnational criminal networks, porous borders, and cross-border insurgencies undermine state-centric strategies for preventing violence.

The Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) of APSA and its regional counterparts in the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are prime examples of institutional efforts to

produce actionable intelligence on new threats in this context. According to Bah (2010) and Williams (2011), political sensitivities about sovereignty and information control, as well as fragmented intelligence collecting and a lack of real-time data sharing, have frequently hindered the efficiency of CEWS. RSCT contributes to this explanation by demonstrating how regional security dynamics may promote or hinder intelligence-sharing cooperation. In the Sahel, for example, intersecting security issues like state fragility, arms trafficking, and terrorism form a complex web of dependency that calls for integrated intelligence strategies. Divergent political objectives, however, frequently obstruct trust-based cooperation within this regional security complex.

Furthermore, comprehending intelligence flows within APSA requires an understanding of the role of regional powers, which is emphasised by RSCT. Nigeria, South Africa, and Ethiopia, because of their strategic location and geopolitical influence in their respective sub regions, have played disproportionate roles in determining the AU's intelligence agenda (Bach, 2007). This asymmetry, however, occasionally perpetuates power disparities that restrict the fair sharing and application of intelligence among member nations, particularly in delicate political situations.

A regional security complex approach thus demonstrates that intelligence inside APSA is a politically embedded function influenced by regional alliances, rivalries, and institutional constraints rather than just a neutral technical exercise. Moving towards real-time, trust-based, and politically sensitive intelligence cooperation is necessary to improve the role of intelligence in conflict prevention. This requires recalibrating the CEWS and REC-level systems to better reflect the dynamic and interconnected character of Africa's security complexes.

Transformations in the African Union's Peace and Security Architecture: Advancing Intelligence in Conflict Prevention.

The African Union's Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) has changed significantly in recent years in terms of how it views intelligence as a conflict-prevention tool. A wider understanding of the necessity of proactive, data-driven strategies to foresee and reduce conflict risks throughout the continent is reflected in this change. An important shift in the way the AU gathers, evaluates, and reacts to intelligence has been brought about by the integration of early warning technologies, particularly through the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS). CEWS is intended to track potential conflict indicators and provide decision-makers with timely information so that proactive security or diplomatic measures can be taken (African Union Commission, 2021).

The APSA's intelligence transformation is also demonstrated by the growing cooperation between continental entities and regional mechanisms. By improving the flow of actionable intelligence, CEWS and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) collaborate to enable a multi-level response to new risks. Additionally, situational awareness obtained from sophisticated information-gathering methods, such as the use of satellite imagery, open-source intelligence (OSINT), and human intelligence (HUMINT), has become more and more important to the African Standby Force (ASF) and the AU's Panel of the Wise (Bah, 2019).

Artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technology usage are changing APSA's intelligence environment. By improving the AU's predictive powers, these technologies could make it possible to identify early warning indicators more quickly and accurately. However, obstacles like a lack of financing, political meddling, and a lack of technical know-how still prohibit intelligence-led conflict prevention from being fully operationalized (Murithi, 2022). The AU is nevertheless committed to establishing a more adaptable and intelligence-driven framework for peace and security, as seen by its continuous reforms and collaborations with outside parties.

The AU's strategic transition from reactive peacekeeping to proactive conflict prevention is ultimately highlighted by the development of intelligence in APSA. In order to meet Africa's complex security concerns and realize the African Union's vision of a continent free from violence, advanced intelligence techniques must be integrated, despite ongoing institutional and operational limitations (Williams, 2020).

A Review of Intelligence's role in Preemptive Deployment, Preventive Diplomacy, and Early Warning.

In contemporary peace and security processes, intelligence is essential, especially in early warning systems, preventative diplomacy, and preemptive deployment. In a time when threats are asymmetrical and complex, prompt and precise intelligence has become essential to efforts to prevent conflicts. Before they become open conflicts, it helps regional and global actors to identify, evaluate, and address possible crises. Intelligence services and international organizations can determine violence triggers and indications using early warning systems, which helps them plan strategic actions (Cilliers, 2008).

In terms of preemptive deployment, intelligence helps to quickly deploy peacekeeping troops to areas that are at risk, frequently before conflict breaks out. This proactive strategy highlights the operational importance of intelligence in guiding military deployment, logistical planning, and risk mitigation, as demonstrated by the African Union's Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) (Williams, 2011). Preemptive deployment is mostly reliant on actionable intelligence that identifies possible instability actors, population vulnerabilities, and impending threats.

Strategic intelligence, on the other hand, is crucial to preventive diplomacy, which uses it to direct diplomatic initiatives meant to reduce anxiety. Decision-makers can customize diplomatic interactions, comprehend the fundamental dynamics of disputes, and identify important stakeholders for negotiations with the help of intelligence (UNDP, 2020). By using intelligence assessments, mediators and envoys can prepare for possible reactions, create messages that are suitable, and steer clear of unforeseen outcomes that might cause tensions to rise.

However, problems with data accuracy, a lack of coordination, and political sensitivities among member nations and organizations frequently limit the efficient use of information in these areas. Despite these obstacles, intelligence continues to be a vital instrument for preventing conflicts since it provides the crucial insight required for prompt action and well-informed diplomacy (Aning & Edu-Afful, 2013). Thus, maintaining peace and security in precarious

situations requires fortifying frameworks for intelligence sharing and improving analytical capacities across regional and global networks.

The Role of Intelligence in APSA: Concepts, Institutions and Operations

The African Peace and Security Architecture's (APSA) effectiveness is greatly increased by intelligence, especially in the areas of early warning, conflict prevention, and decision-making. Intelligence, according to Kent (1949), is the gathering, evaluating, and sharing of data that is pertinent to regional or national security. The main framework for APSA's intelligence operations is the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), which collects and evaluates information to predict conflicts and provide information to the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union. The use of information in this situation fits with the African Union's (AU) normative trend towards proactive peacebuilding and conflict resolution by reflecting a preventive rather than reactive approach to security (African Union Commission, 2020).

Institutionally, APSA's intelligence is part of a networked system that includes CEWS, the African Standby Force (ASF), and regional economic communities (RECs). Together, these elements create intelligence that is both current and useful. To ensure information flows throughout the continental security framework, CEWS, in particular, works with regional early warning systems (Bah, 2014). However, problems like lack of political will, capacity shortages, and poor technical integration restrict these organizations' efficacy. Despite these difficulties, there have been some noteworthy achievements, such as better strategic planning through intelligence-led assessments and increased situational awareness during peacekeeping missions (Dersso, 2016). Operationally, by directing the formulation and implementation of directives, intelligence aids APSA's peace efforts. In the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, for example, AU-led missions rely on intelligence from member states and CEWS to inform strategic decision-making. Additionally, intelligence helps safeguard civilian populations and peacekeepers by detecting dangers and suggesting countermeasures (Williams, 2021). Underdeveloped analytical skills and disjointed data-sharing procedures, however, continue to hinder operational intelligence. In order to enhance real-time situational awareness and response effectiveness, strengthening intelligence operations within APSA necessitates institutional reforms, capacity building, and the incorporation of cutting-edge technologies, such as artificial intelligence and GIS tools (Aboagye, 2021).

Challenges to Intelligence Integration in Conflict Prevention

Political will and sovereignty sensitivities: Concerns about sovereignty, mistrust, and the possibility of political abuse make member states hesitant to exchange intelligence (Shilaho, 2021). As a result, the AU is unable to create a centralized intelligence system that could guide early intervention plans.

Example: Burundi Crisis (2015–2016): Amid the political turmoil in Burundi after President Pierre Nkurunziza's contentious attempt for a third term, AU member states couldn't agree on how to react. An AU peacekeeping operation (MAPROBU) was denied by Burundi, citing sovereignty, despite concerning early warning indicators. The reluctance of neighboring states to divulge sensitive material due to concerns about political repercussions or charges of meddling hampered intelligence exchange. Limited access to verifiable intelligence and a lack of unified political will contributed to the AU's incapacity to take decisive action (Shilaho, 2021).

Capacity Constraints: There are significant human and technical capacity shortages at CEWS and associated AU agencies. There aren't many intelligence analysts, and data analytics technologies aren't as advanced as they should be. Real-time risk assessment and forecasting are compromised by these constraints (De Waal, 2020).

Example: Conflict in the Central African Republic (2013–present) Because there were insufficiently trained analysts and no real-time data integration technologies, the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) found it difficult to deliver timely intelligence on the rise of violence in CAR. This caused AU Peace Support Operations to respond slowly and to coordinate poorly. The technical and human resource constraints were brought to light by the AU mission's (MISCA) heavy reliance on outside parties for situational updates, such as the UN and the French military (De Waal, 2020).

Fragmentation and lack of unity: National intelligence services, regional systems, and the continental level are not in sync. In the absence of formalized frameworks for intelligence harmonization, actionable information frequently lags or disappears (Bah, 2023).

Example: Unrest in the Sahel Region: There are few established intelligence-sharing protocols between the AU and regional bodies like the G5 Sahel, and national intelligence services in the Sahel, which includes nations like Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, frequently function in silos. For instance, the coup in Mali in 2021 surprised AU processes because ECOWAS and local information was not routinely incorporated into the AU's CEWS, even though the situation was getting worse. Effective policy and military responses were delayed by this institutional divergence (Bah, 2023).

Inadequate Integration of Technologies: Cyber intelligence, open-source intelligence (OSINT), and geospatial technology are key components of modern intelligence. The AU's current procedures are not sufficiently suited to properly utilize these technologies, which limits strategic foresight and situational awareness (Nhema & Zeleza, 2021).

Example: Ethiopia's Tigray Conflict (2020–2022): A lack of access to contemporary surveillance and OSINT techniques contributed to the AU's inability to predict the scope and severity of the Tigray war. The AU's peace and security architecture lacked the technology infrastructure necessary to effectively gather, validate, and analyze the kind of early warning signals that satellite imagery and social media could have provided. The diplomatic response was delayed and the escalation was not prevented in part because of this technology lag (Nhema & Zeleza, 2021).

CASE STUDIES: INTELLIGENCE IN CONFLICT PREVENTION EFFORTS.

Case Study 1: Mali (2012–2024): MINUSMA, CEWS Inputs and the Limits of Mission Intelligence.

The Malian conflict revealed the potential and limitations of intelligence-driven peacekeeping efforts in a challenging counter-insurgency and state-fragility setting. Political disarray and a lack of state cooperation limited the prospects for preventive diplomacy, despite the fact that CEWS and AU analytical products had identified increasing instability before the 2012 crisis (Noyes & Yarwood, 2015). Mission JMAC/ASIFU structures and other advanced all-source fusion capabilities were established by MINUSMA, the UN mission that took the place of previous African-led stabilization operations. These capabilities enhanced mission leadership's tactical situational awareness and strategic analysis (Dorn, 2018). Operational constraints (helicopter shortages, challenged consent, and contested information-sharing with national services) limited the mission's ability to take prompt preventive action, therefore MINUSMA's intelligence advantages did not fully convert into protective outcomes (CIVIC, 2020).

Researchers observe that although MINUSMA's intelligence architecture produced better event data and threat assessments, the key obstacle was still the political will at the national and regional levels to implement those assessments (Rietjens & Dorn, 2017). In general, the Mali incident demonstrates that mission-level intelligence, when available, can increase the accuracy of early warnings, but it is not enough for successful prevention unless institutional channels connect analysis to prompt political and operational choices (Stimson, 2024; Noyes & Yarwood, 2015).

Case Study 2: Darfur / Sudan (2004–2010 And 2019–2024): AU Political Intelligence, AMIS Experience and the Transition to Hybrid and UN Mechanisms.

An early test of APSA's intelligence and early-warning goals was provided by the AU's first large-scale field operation in Darfur (AMIS), which carried out regular monitoring, human-report networks, and reporting that were essential to AU situational awareness from 2004 to 2007 (GAO, 2007). However, AMIS lacked the logistical, analytical, and protection capacities to turn warnings into effective deterrent action, demonstrating how collection without credible response options weakens deterrence (AMIS lessons learned; AU PSC communiqués).

Recent crises in Sudan demonstrate the AU's enduring strength in politico-diplomatic early warning, but they also highlight enduring restrictions on the sharing of classified intelligence and political sensitivities that impede collaborative AU-UN preventive efforts (AU press briefings;

UNITAMS/UN reports, 2023–24). Darfur, in summary, emphasizes that the credibility of continental early-warning relies on both analytical ability and safe, reliable means for communicating sensitive intelligence to regional actors and political decision-makers (AMIS review; AU documents).

Case Study 3: South Sudan (2012–Present): Regional Intelligence, Mediation, and the Collapse of Preventive Windows.

South Sudan serves as an example of how, even in situations with official early-warning systems, deficiencies in political coordination and intelligence fusion can permit quick escalation. Prior to the 2013–2014 violence, regional bodies (IGAD) and the AU produced risk reports and indicators about growing polarization; however, due to conflicting national interests and inadequate enforcement tools, these warnings did not result in a prompt, cohesive preventive strategy (IGAD/ACCORD analyses; Reyntjens-style studies). Granular alerts were provided by local early-warning actors and civil-society networks, but these were frequently fragmented and not fully integrated into regional intelligence products that may force preventive action (CEWARN/IGAD evaluations).

Additionally, the politicization of security information, in which rival elites weaponized intelligence, weakened confidence between regional mediators and capitals, reducing the transformative potential of intelligence for deployment in prevention and mediation (ACCORD; IGAD reports). Thus, the South Sudan case emphasizes how, in accordance with APSA (operational lessons from South Sudan), intelligence must be able to facilitate prevention through institutionalized fusion processes and trust, not only analytical ability.

Case Study 4: Somalia (2007–2024): AMISOM/ATMIS, Intelligence Training and the El-Adde Intelligence Failure.

Somalia serves as a mixed example of the possible benefits of ongoing intelligence spending and the drawbacks of information failures. Training programs and tactical intelligence units that improved operational targeting of al-Shabab were among the collaborative intelligence techniques that AMISOM (now ATMIS) implemented with Somali security institutions and foreign partners (AU/AMISOM reports; Stimson study). Major territorial recoveries in some areas and better planning for stabilization efforts were made possible by these intelligence capabilities (AMISOM lessons-learned). Investigators pointed to fragmented information flows and inadequate data verification as contributing factors in a number of high-profile intelligence failures, most notably the 2016 El-Adde attack on a Kenyan base, which exposed serious deficiencies in threat-sharing and tactical early warning (media investigations; stability studies).

Additionally, conflicting political objectives and operational security concerns hindered the integration of mission intelligence with national authorities, often impeding force posture modifications or preemptive evacuations (AMISOM conference reports; CSIS assessments). Thus, Somalia shows that operationalization trusted sharing, quick decision-making, and force readiness

determines whether intelligence prevents violence or only records it after it has already occurred, even while ongoing intelligence capacity-building can yield strategic benefits.

Case Study 5: Cabo Delgado, Mozambique (2017–2025): Regional Responses, Under-Reporting and Intelligence Deficits.

The conflict in the province of Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, demonstrates how regional and national intelligence deficiencies can impede the implementation of effective preventive measures and make AU/APSA engagement more difficult. Though politicized narratives and underreporting hampered the accuracy of national reporting and impeded early regional mobilization, early indicators of radicalism, illegal trafficking, and resource-linked concerns appeared years before widespread violence (Crisis Group; ACLED studies). There were operational intelligence gaps as a result of the multilateral intelligence architecture for the theatre being patchy, with national services protecting information and regional fusion mechanisms being limited. SADC launched SAMIM when the crisis escalated, and several bilateral deployments followed, most notably Rwanda (SADC and SAMIM reviews; Accord commentary).

Questions concerning responsibility for intelligence-led activities were highlighted by the fragmented information environment that resulted, which also made it difficult to plan preventively (journalistic and policy reports; USIP). Thus, Cabo Delgado draws attention to the dangers of inadequate regional intelligence sharing and the necessity of politically neutral, interoperable channels to facilitate preventive action within the purview of APSA.

Cross-Case Synthesis: Lessons for APSA and Intelligence-Led Prevention.

There are three recurring themes in all five cases: First, analytical capability is important: mission-level fusion cells and CEWS can generate high-quality indications and warnings (Noyes & Yarwood, 2015; Dorn, 2018); and second, institutional and political trust is the key to turning intelligence into preventive action; without depoliticized channels and trusted sharing mechanisms, even excellent analysis could be weaponized or ignored (AU PSC briefs; UNITAMS reporting). Third, to achieve the preventive potential of intelligence, operational linkages—that is, the ability to translate warning into response through ready forces, logistics, and legal authority—are required; analysis by itself cannot replace credible response options (MINUSMA and AMIS lessons; SAMIM assessments). These lessons indicate that APSA's intelligence ambition should be pursued as a multi-dimensional reform that combines technical capacity, legal/procedural safeguards for classified sharing, and political arrangements that build state trust.

CONCLUSION

This paper has critically analyzed intelligence's function within the African Union Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), emphasizing its strategic importance in averting conflicts on the continent. Although intelligence has gained institutional traction, especially through frameworks like the African Standby Force (ASF) and the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), its practical utility is still limited by fragmented structures, political sensitivities, and a lack of

technical capacity, according to the analysis, which draws on secondary data and comparative insights.

The results demonstrate that the APSA's pillars' insufficient intelligence integration adds to the ongoing "warning–response gap," which compromises the AU's capacity to take preventative action in unstable situations. On the other hand, intelligence may improve coordinated responses, improve predictive analysis, and increase the legitimacy of AU-led peace efforts when it is carefully installed and protected from political manipulation. This calls for a political change towards trust-based intelligence collaboration between member states, AU Commission, and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in addition to technical transformation.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by redefining intelligence as a key operational pillar within APSA's conflict prevention mandate, rather than just a support role. This work analyses the structural, normative, and operational consequences of intelligence integration across the AU peace architecture, in contrast to earlier research that mostly focused on early warning or institutional design. It offers a sophisticated approach to integrating politically viable and context-sensitive intelligence frameworks by introducing a multilevel governance viewpoint to comprehend the relationship between national intelligence sovereignty and continental security requirements. By doing this, the research contributes to academic discussions and useful policy ideas about the institutionalization of intelligence as a preventive diplomacy instrument in Africa.

In conclusion, improving early warning systems is simply one aspect of bolstering the AU's conflict prevention toolset; another is creating a professionalized, interoperable, and politically controlled intelligence infrastructure. It is now imperative that intelligence be included more deeply into APSA in order to fulfil the AU's mission of "African solutions to African problems."

RECOMMENDATIONS TOWARDS A STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE FRAMEWORK IN THE AU.

Establishing an African Intelligence Fusion Centre (AIFC): A centralized intelligence fusion center that works with regional and national intelligence agencies should be established by the AU to combat fragmentation. This organization may perform strategic analysis, compile data, and provide the PSC and other AU organs with insights straight from the source.

Investing in Technology and Predictive Analytics: To improve CEWS's predictive powers, the AU must give top priority to investments in machine learning, artificial intelligence, and satellite imaging. The quality and timeliness of intelligence would be further enhanced by educating analysts in advanced data science.

Strengthening Political Responsibility: It is imperative that the PSC hold member states responsible for disregarding early warnings. Establishing a uniform procedure for responding to intelligence alerts, similar to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) theory, would institutionalize preventive reactions.

Building Trust and Cooperation in the Region: Barriers relating to sovereignty can be addressed with the aid of trust-building techniques among member states, such as cooperative training exercises and intelligence-sharing procedures. Additionally, cooperation with international organizations like the UN and EU can offer financial and technical assistance.

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