

Book review

Towards an African Peace and Security regime: Continental embeddedness, transnational linkages, strategic relevance

Ulf Engel and João Gomes Porto eds. 2013

*Farnham, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 257 pages.
ISBN 9780754676041*

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The anticipated establishment of an African Standby Force (ASF) in 2015 and the interim African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC), in the midst of new and continuing conflicts, have sparked renewed interest in the underpinnings of, and prospects for, the African Peace and Security Architecture. The unique African security environment, consisting of a revived continental organisation working to implement its policies through the capacities of eight recognised Regional Economic Communities (RECs), in the context of extensive external security sector involvement, presents questions for the sustainability and efficiency of this network of actors and their continued engagement. Answering these questions is the subject of this book.

The volume examines the incipient African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) with a view to providing ‘informed and critical reflection on the adequacy of the emerging African peace and security architecture ... to [the] short, medium and long-term challenges and ensuing opportunities for conflict prevention, management and resolution in Africa’ (p. 1). It also seeks to probe more deeply conceptual questions of the ‘embeddedness’ of norms, values and processes among African states, especially the AU and the RECs; to examine transnational linkages that draw together major continental and international actors in the field of security provision; and, to engage questions on ‘the long-term adequacy and relevance of the APSA itself’ (p. 2).

This is a solid volume of 11 essays edited by two experts and practitioners in the field, Ulf Engel and João Gomes Porto, and bringing together the knowledge of a number of authors with expertise on the African Peace and Security Architecture, from the African continent and beyond. As noted by the subtitle, the book is divided into 3 main parts, Continental Embeddedness, Transnational Linkages, and Strategic Relevance.

Part I deals with the key issue of norm transference on the African continent. Two authors tackle the question of how norms become embedded among the key security actors on the African continent, with shared norms seen as the central underpinning to a well-functioning peace and security architecture. The arguments of ‘norm contestation’ and ‘paradigm shift’, are marshalled by Antonia Witt and Martin Welz, respectively, to explain the varying acceptance of the non-indifference norm among African states, and between African RECs and the AU, for example. A third chapter by Rodrigo Tavares and Tânia Felício examines the coordination and cooperation of regional organisations with global organisations such as the UN in the implementation of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).

Part II deals with transnational linkages, and considers the unique ‘multi-level logic’ of security cooperation in Africa (chapter by Benedikt Franke), examining how Africa’s RECs cooperate with the AU to provide capacity and substance to the ideal of ‘African solutions to African problems’. This approach is extended to two empirical examples, those of ECOWAS in West Africa (chapter by Emma

Birikorang) and SADC (chapter by Anthoni van Nieuwkerk) in Southern Africa, as well as the example of COMWARN, the early warning mechanism of COMESA (chapter by João Gomes Porto). These three chapters help to provide a clear understanding of how the RECs interact with the AU in the provision of security and in the prevention of conflict. Each argues for a recognition of the benefit that can be derived from the 'organised complementarity' (Franke, p. 74) that the AU and its RECs enjoy. Franke adds the key point that allowing RECs to maintain their autonomy actually *revitalised* continental governance, and allows for the adaptability that managing conflicts on the continent demands (p. 74 and p. 81).

Part III of the volume takes a longer view, examining the long-term relevance and adequacy of the African Peace and Security Architecture. Here, the contribution to security outcomes by peacekeepers is problematised by Andreas Mehler. The importance of cooperation on intelligence gathering and use (chapter by Lauren Hutton), and capacity-building (chapter by Markus Koerner and Mulugeta Gebrehiwot) is highlighted. Finally a closer look at the Peace and Security Council (PSC) is afforded by Kwesi Aning.

This is by no means the first book on the African Peace and Security Architecture. A number of other edited volumes have charted this course before. What this volume does is to bring into conceptual focus, through the examination of key empirical cases, the sticky issues that affect the efficiency of the APSA. These include questions about the extent to which norms, values and processes are embedded among African security actors; how African actors work together, and with external actors, in pursuit of Africa's security goals; and, the long-term adequacy and effectiveness of these arrangements. There is a growing academic concern with African 'agency', or how African states, regional and continental bodies are able to project their influence on the contexts they inhabit. Without the term 'agency' being engaged explicitly in the book, this volume addresses the issue of African agency by providing a clear analysis of the instruments available to implement the African Peace and Security Architecture, and thus makes a valuable contribution to those debates.

While the fit between the three key themes of the book, though appearing to be obvious, is sometimes tenuous, the volume is an important contribution to thinking about the African peace and security landscape and the actors who populate it. Just as a discipline – not quite Political Science and not quite International Relations – has emerged around the study of European Union politics, this book shows that there is much to be gained from studying the unique way in which the African Union, the RECs, African states, and external actors work – or do not work – together to achieve a more peaceful African continent.

A discussion that is absent in this volume is the Libyan crisis of 2011, and its impact on APSA. This may be more due to the timing of the production process than an oversight of the authors, however. A discussion of this crisis would be a welcome addition to a future volume. By way of lending coherence to the volume, the editors might have shared how the volume came into being, and what drew the various contributors together, writing on the subjects they have selected. This is important because it would have provided a stronger conceptual – and perhaps even theoretical – hinge to the volume. On a similar note, while the term ‘regime’ appears in the title of the volume, there is not much by way of explanation of or engagement with it – something that might have provided a number of insights into how the entire APSA system currently hangs together. One definition of ‘regimes’ sees them as ‘principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a given issue-area’ (Krasner 1982). While this may not be the meaning intended by the editors, it is not clear which meaning is conveyed by the use of this term in the title of the book.

Lastly, while a comprehensive chapter by one of the editors, João Gomes Porto, is dedicated to early warning, all of the pillars of the APSA, namely the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the African Standby Force (ASF), the Panel of the Wise (PoW) and the Africa Peace Fund (APF) do not enjoy balanced attention.

Notwithstanding, this book is a key contribution to the study, not only of the instruments for maintaining peace and security on the African continent, and Africa’s international relations, but most importantly, to the illumination of

how African continental conflict management modestly works and, in places, succeeds. It will be useful to any scholar of Africa, as well as to those conducting comparative research on peace and security architectures across a number of regions. It will be useful to university students of African continental politics and established scholars alike.