Towards Assessing the Security Landscape in Contemporary Africa

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Abstract
The 54 states that make up the vast continent of Africa face different security risks depending on the nation and the area. The local dynamics, tactics, and interests of the local actors typically influence the existence of these threats. Conflicts abound in post-independence Africa. African states saw a high frequency of intra-state disputes in the post-Cold War era, which led to multiple instances of state implosion. These internal conflicts, often known as "new wars," differed from previous traditional civil wars in that they blurred the boundaries between organised crime, violence, and widespread human rights violations. However, due to major efforts by African and international initiatives in conflict prevention, management, and resolution, there has been a decrease in armed conflicts in Africa in recent years. The security environment has evolved. Although armed conflicts have been the continent of Africa's most catastrophic security concern, they are being overshadowed by new and rising security challenges. The security situation and security sector reform (henceforth referred to as SSR) in Africa in the twenty-first century are examined in this paper. From the standpoint of human security, it examines the dynamics of Africa's current security issues. The thesis here is that a far broader analytical lens that captures the wider, interconnected complexities of Africa's security concerns is necessary when analysing these dilemmas, rather than a restricted state-centric or regime-centric approach. As a result, it examines regional and global initiatives and tactics that have addressed these issues. One of the main points of the paper is that institutional and governmental weakness are the main causes of Africa's security problems. This paper also examines SSR in Africa in a number of ways. After examining the concept's beginnings, it discusses its more contemporary interpretations. From the viewpoints of donors, beneficiaries, multilateral development players, and regional security organisations, its conceptual overview will discuss the significance of SSR for global security. It looks at the achievements and shortcomings of SSR in changing African nations. As the paper comes to a close, it considers the difficulties that SSR faces in Africa, such as the issues of donor dominance, political acceptance, the policy gap, and operational complexity (rough neighbourhoods, resource limitations, and skills shortages).'

Keywords: *Africa, Security, Security Sector Reform, International Security, Regional Security Organization*

Introduction

Naturally, one may wonder why it is important to research and comprehend Africa's security issues and security sector reform (SSR). The Great Powers have historically put it on the geopolitical

backburner. Additionally, there has been the perception that Africa is unique and perhaps abnormal (Lake & Morgan, 2025, p. 49). One apparent response is that if it didn't matter, why has it garnered so much interest on a global scale, especially since the end of the Cold War? The United States elected AFRICOM as its newest Central Command in October 2009. Up to that point, PACOM, CENTCOM, and EUROCOM shared responsibility for Africa. Due in part to its colonial past, Europe has historically been more interested in Africa than the Americas or Asia, and it is still active in the continent. Perhaps the most active external power is China, the relatively recent suitor. Africa and the Arab world have significant interactions. But Africa's significance extends far beyond its growing geopolitical significance. "Africa Rising" appeared on the cover of *The Economist* on December 3, 2011. Africa and its fifty-four nations do not appear to pose a threat to global security (Geschiere, 2024). Only three instances of interstate war have occurred since African nations gained their independence: Tanzania's invasion of Uganda in 1978 to remove Idi Amin, the Somalia-Ethiopian conflict in Ogden territory in 1977–1978, and the Ethiopian conflict with Eritrea in 2000. Other disputes that could fall under this category include as follows: Ethiopia versus Somalia in the 1970s, Rwanda versus Uganda in 2002, Libya versus Chad in the 1980s, and perhaps South Africa's destabilisation campaign in the 1980s.

Conflicts and other security risks abound in post-independence Africa. African states saw a high frequency of intra-state disputes in the post-Cold War era, which led to multiple instances of state implosion. These internal conflicts, often known as "new wars," differed from previous traditional civil wars in that they blurred the boundaries between organised crime, violence, and widespread human rights violations (Kandeh, 2024). However, due to major efforts by African and international initiatives in conflict prevention, management, and resolution, there has been a decrease in armed conflicts in Africa in recent years. The security environment has evolved. "New and emerging security challenges—what could be called 'old' challenges—are being superimposed on armed conflicts, which have been the most devastating security challenge for the African continent" (Aall, 2025, p. 67).

Political violence, demographic shifts and the youth bulge, food shortages, and the easy access to small arms and light weapons (SALW) are the key causes of the ongoing intra- and inter-state violent conflicts, which continue to be the old security dilemma (Acharya & Buzan, 2025). The expansion of interconnected trans-organized criminal activities, such as illicit drug trafficking, internet fraud, human trafficking, money laundering, exploitation and smuggling of natural resources, and terrorist networks, are among the new challenges that have their roots in the old ones (Bach, 2025).

It will be evident that Africa is in a seemingly never-ending security situation if we look beyond violent conflict to other important markers of insecurity, such as socioeconomic problems, population change, environmental degradation, and governance issues. Africa's major international indices are alarming. Ten African nations, for instance, were placed lowest in the 2021 Human Development Index (Guinea, Central Africa Republic, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Chad, Mozambique, Burundi, Niger, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)) (quoted in Abrahamsen, 2022, p. 32). In a similar vein, four African nations—Sudan, DRC, Chad, and Somalia—took the top spot on the 2021 failed states index once more (Abrahamsen, 2022). Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be the least peaceful region, according to the Global Peace Indexes of 2020 and 2021. With Sudan and Somalia at the bottom of the index, ranked 151 and 153, respectively, the area is home to 40% of the world's least peaceful nations. This dilemma was hinted at by analysts such as Robert Dallaire (2023) and Samuel Chesterman (2024), who connected the processes of state-making in terms of institution-building and territorial

consolidation with conflicts and insecurity in the developing world. The African security situation has been explained by other interconnected elements, such as the legacy of colonialism (Abdullah, 2018; El-Affendi, 2019; Denng et al, 2019; Chabale, 2019, 2025). Undoubtedly, a variety of interrelated historical, political, economic, and sociocultural variables contribute to Africa's security dilemma. However, the weakness of the African state is also a major contributing factor to these security issues, which show up as a lack of institutional capacity to address its many problems. According to Ohlsson (2019), Badmus (2019), Abdellaoui (2019), Chabale & Daloz (2019), Ela (2020), and Chabale (2025), the tendency toward violence or conflict in Africa is more related to the nature of the African state and the accompanying insecurities it creates than to the good or evil nature of a particular actor or the pathological predispositions of a particular society or culture.

Good civil-military ties indicate the security sector's professional and operational efficacy, which is strengthened by its responsible administration, democratic monitoring, and accountability. Many democratic polities experience it, and those that are undergoing transformation aim to achieve it. Simple transitions, however, are not always clear-cut and necessitate certain circumstances. Reforming the security sector can be a useful strategy for reaching these goals. However, there is a contradiction in Africa: while reforming elites seek good civil-military ties and security sector governance, others resist it for ideological and political reasons.

In fact, recent research shows that security sector reform and transformation (henceforth referred to as SSR) has a difficult time gaining legitimacy as a valid instrument for regulating civil-military interactions. As a result, one researcher called her study of SSR in Africa "a bridge too far" (Haugen, 2016). There are many different reasons. According to Jacksson and Rosbergh's (2022, pp. 54–59) study on security sector governance issues in West Africa, there is very little room for reform in at least one-third of the region's states, and some of the few attempts at SSR at the national level have been pushed by outside advocates rather than internal forces. Additionally, they discovered that the leadership had little political will to start a thorough reform process that participatory processes were uncommon, and that, as a result, collective ownership of reform was essentially nonexistent. "These considerations do not paint a rosy picture for the development of legitimate, participatory, and sustainable reform processes across West Africa," they conclude (Jacksson & Rosbergh, 2022, p. 59). Similarly, after analysing SSR in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Neumann (2023) and Gerard-Libois (2023) discovered that there was no standard method for SSR and that, in reality, the idea fell short of its creative potential. They recommend that for its potential to be realized, the SSR dialogue needs to take voices and experiences from the global South into account, rather than merely reflect a donor perspective.

What is it in the idea and practice of SSR that makes it such an apparently contentious intervention that its applicability to African nations and polities emerging from conflict or misrule is dubious? In what circumstances may SSR be effectively implemented in Africa, or is the idea essentially faulty?

The security predicament and security sector reform (henceforth referred to as SSR) in Africa in the twenty-first century are examined in this paper. From the standpoint of human security, it examines the dynamics of Africa's current security issues. The thesis here is that a far broader analytical lens that captures the wider, interconnected complexities of Africa's security concerns is necessary when analysing these dilemmas, rather than a restricted state-centric or regime-centric approach. As a result, it examines regional and global initiatives and tactics that have addressed these issues. One of the main points of the paper is that institutional and governmental weakness are the main causes of Africa's security problems. This paper also examines SSR in Africa from a

number of perspectives. After examining the concept's historical roots, it discusses its more contemporary interpretations. From the viewpoints of donors, beneficiaries, multilateral development players, and regional security organisations, its conceptual overview will discuss the significance of SSR for global security. It looks at the achievements and shortcomings of SSR in changing African nations. As the paper comes to a close, it considers the difficulties that SSR faces in Africa, such as the issues of donor dominance, political acceptance, the policy gap, and operational complexity (rough neighbourhoods, resource limitations, and skills shortages).

Conceptualizing Africa's Security Landscape

The 54 states that make up the vast continent of Africa face different security risks depending on the nation and the area. The local dynamics, tactics, and interests of the local actors typically influence the existence of these threats (Kaplinsky, 2015, p. 26; Utasse, 2018; Iyob, 2019; Zakalia, 2026, p. 44). The traditional or state-centric idea of security has given way to a more all-encompassing idea with the individual as the point of reference in the post-Cold War era. Human security within states has not been improved by the traditional concept of security, which is centred on how governments utilise force to counter threats to their territorial integrity, autonomy, and domestic political order from other states (Zakalia, 2025, p. 21). According to the new security thinking, the militaristic conception of security that predominated during the Cold War is too limited to comprehend the security issues of today (Rabasa et al., 2017; Reeds, 2024). Threats to security in the post-Cold War era come not from outside forces but from the state and its citizens. A paradigm change from a state-centered militaristic framing to an individual or human security framework has occurred as a result of the necessity to expand the idea to cover political, economic, social, and environmental risks. This paradigm of analysis emphasises freedom from fear and freedom from want while frequently fusing traditional security concerns with human development and other fundamental human needs (Pedersen, 2018; Zac's, 2022; Youg, 2024; Wulff & Devebiel, 2025).

In retrospect, Africa's current security or human security landscape paints a bleak picture. While old security threats, such as violent armed conflicts and political violence, which posed the biggest threat to the security of states and peoples on the continent, have been diminishing, new security threats, such as poor socioeconomic conditions, recurrent sectarian violence, climate change, food insecurity, and the proliferation of illicit SALW, continue to be prevalent in many African states (Schitt & Wints, 2023; Ranged, 2025). The proliferation of SALW is a real obstacle to the pursuit of peace and stability. They have been dubbed the continent's weapons of mass destruction because their availability encourages robbery, violent crimes, and armed strife. Africa is home to 100 million of the projected 500 million small guns and light weapons in illicit circulation globally (Saitche, 2025). Significant violations of international humanitarian law and human rights have been made possible by the ubiquitous availability of SALWs. Additionally, it has contributed to the emergence of a violent culture that threatens and, in certain cases, has destroyed the social fabric of numerous African nations. They have also played a part in the emergence of the child soldier phenomenon. SALW have, thus, undermined efforts at economic development, good governance and democratization (Saitche, 2025). More civilians have died directly and indirectly as a result of the use of SALW than due to weapons of mass destruction (Olonisakin, 2021, p. 35; Schatzbery, 2021, 2024; Salehyand, 2026).

The New Security Predicament

Both the old and new security challenges often outstrip the capacity of the weak institutions of the African state to adequately respond. This paper will critically examine some of the new security challenges: specifically, governance, transnational organised crime, and terrorism; each contributes to the twenty-first-century security predicament in Africa.

The Governance Predicament

In Africa, the problem of good governance is not new. One of the most important facets of African governments' post-independence political histories has been governance, or poor governance. It has been the main cause of instability on the continent. Political violence frequently results in military interventions and catastrophic intra-state conflicts due to a lack of democracy and transparent administration (Okumu, 2022; Schermer, 2025). In particular, poor governance, mental illness, poverty, group inequality, resource competitiveness, and weak and predatory institutions have all been blamed for conflicts and the ensuing humanitarian disasters (Tadesse, 2022a). In the face of a weak civil society counterforce, discriminatory political arrangements and brittle, dysfunctional, and oppressive institutions are structural causes of violence and conflict in Africa (Tadesse, 2022b). "Institutional corruption, ethnic/religious intolerance and extremism, manipulation of constitutions and electoral processes, organised crime, environmental degradation and food insecurity; demographic pressures, falling educational standards and youth unemployment . . ." are some of the structural causes that give rise to conflict triggers (Tadesse, 2022b). Furthermore, the sub-regions' ongoing political instability is a result of the governance deficit, which includes both poor governance and oppressive policies as well as governments' inability to foresee disputes and effectively handle them. Even where states are not involved directly in crisis situations, their responses to information on impending conflicts have often been slow (Laclau & Mouffe, 2019; Hasenclever et al, 2023, p. 122; Lawrence, 2025).

Many African nations have successfully transitioned from full-fledged military/civilian authoritarian rule to various forms of multiparty democracies, despite the constraints inherent in these transitions (Kaplan, 1994; Ghazvinian, 2017; Peterson, 2023). It was anticipated that African nations would pursue good governance in order to foster stability and sustained growth. These hopes, however, have not lasted long because the majority of the continent's states and citizens have yet to reap the true benefits of democracy and sound governance. With the exception of some countries, such as Mauritius, Cape Verde, Botswana, Seychelles, South Africa, Benin, and Ghana, most African states are at varying stages of institutionalising democracy and good governance.

However, there is a mixed overall tendency across Africa. Both human development and sustainable economic opportunity have improved in certain nations. The bulk of Africa's new administrations are mixed regimes with a tendency toward violence rather than full democracies, despite the reduction in military dictatorships and one-party regimes. If Africa is to advance emancipatory politics and stable security, there must be substantial political transformation. Put differently, security that is grounded in justice, change, and people (Peggy, 2019; Yabiz, 2023). Democracy is more than a band-aid solution.

There have been instances in Guinea in September 2021, Mauritania in August 2008, Niger in July 2023, Mali in May 2021, and Guinea-Bissau in November 2025, despite the fact that military intervention has grown less acceptable in modern African politics. Attempts by incumbent leaders to tamper with electoral laws and constitutions in order to extend their terms in office are partially to blame for the resurgence of coups in the political landscape. There have occasionally been large-scale public demonstrations, with violent outcomes resulting from confrontations between

demonstrators and official security forces. For example, protests occurred when former Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade attempted to run for a third term by amending the nation's electoral laws. Over 100 people were hurt in clashes between demonstrators and police. As a result, tensions increased in a nation that had long been praised as a relative haven of peace in a volatile West African subregion. Conflicts and tensions have resulted from elections that have not been free and fair in some African states. In many African nations, election-related violence has resulted in thousands of deaths as well as the destruction of priceless assets and infrastructure. The savage post-election violence in Côte d'Ivoire cost an estimated 3,000 deaths, and over a million were either domestically displaced or forced to escape as refugees in neighboring countries. There were also reports of human rights violations and abuses, such as extra-judicial executions, ill treatment, arbitrary detention, excessive use of force, disappearances, and sexual violence, by both the state security forces and militias loyal to former president, Umaro Sissoco Embalo, or to President Mohamed Bazoum (Fawcett, 2025; Fairhead & Leach, 2026).

A new wave of political upheaval in North Africa known as the Arab Spring or Jasmine Revolution also caught Africa off guard. In several North African nations, including Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, there have been mass protests against some of the longest-serving autocratic dictators since December 2010. Libya's Maumar Gaddafi responded violently to anti-government demonstrators and civilians, while Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and Tunisia's Zine El Abidine Ben Ali resigned during the uprisings. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces were then authorised by a United Nations Security Council decision (decision 1973) to take all necessary steps to defend civilians from Gaddafi's regime's systemic atrocities (Deininger, 2023; Baehr, 2024). Gaddafi was eventually ousted by rebel forces, captured and killed.

There have been two sides to the Arab Spring. On the one hand, they are noteworthy examples in the political history of the continent of common people overthrowing dictatorships to remove their leaders, despite the evident legal issues (Davidson, 1992; Abass, 2020, p. 43; Deut, 2024). However, the ensuing violence, particularly the fatal conflicts in Libya, caused widespread infrastructure loss and civilian casualties (Bagayoko-Penone, 2023; Bach, 2024; Zakalia, 2026). Both casualties and refugees were among the many victims who were civilians (Bach, 2023; Fairhead & Leach, 2026).

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) has been clarified by the international community, especially in light of Resolution 1973. In the framework of safeguarding people, NATO's intervention to implement the resolution is praiseworthy. But the quick switch from diplomacy to military action raises concerns about the mission's true purpose (Ehrenreich, 2023; Eisenstein, 2025). Additionally, the international community's attitude to violent repression in non-African nations is very different from the strategy used in Libya. The question of whether this is a new kind of interventionism in Africa is raised by this. If foreign intervention is motivated by the need to protect vulnerable populations from brutalities, (as the R2P norm encourages) or from the repression of their own despotic leaders, then the intervention in Libya smacks of a double standard (Fiona, 2022; Bach, 2022; Mamdani, 2024). The international community has not responded in a similar way in Yemen, Syria and Bahrain.

Furthermore, the Libyan crisis may have detrimental effects on Africa, West Africa, and the Sahel, including the spread of SALWs. According to reports, the Gaddafi dictatorship hired mercenaries from various African nations, including Niger, Mali, and Chad, and armed loyalists (Mamdani, 2022a; Lawrence, 2025). For example, the return of Gaddafi-trained and equipped Tuareg soldiers to Niger raises major questions about what new demands these groups might make of the weak regimes in Mali and Niger (Schatzbery, 2021; Mamdani, 2022b; Nuggett, 2022; Ranged, 2025).

We know the answer in the instance of Mali; it has been widely reported that the uprising in Northern Mali was rekindled by the return of hundreds of heavily armed Tuareg mercenaries who had fought for both Gaddafi and the National Transitional Council (NTC) rebels. With a population that extends beyond Mali's boundaries into neighbouring Algeria and Niger, the Tuareg National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) has been fighting for a distinct Islamic state in the north (Van-Nieuwe, 2022; Salehyand, 2026). On March 22, 2012, mid-ranking military officers led by Captain Amadou Sonogo conducted a coup in response to a mutiny by certain army factions, following months of attacks by Tuareg rebels against the military and civilians. Just one month before the nation was scheduled to hold elections, the coup took place. President Amadou Toumani Toure's administration, according to the coup organisers in Mali, was not giving the army enough logistical support to put an end to the Tuareg insurgency. The country, which was undergoing a democratic transition, is now experiencing a political crisis as a result of the separatist conflict and the coup, which has also made the nation more susceptible to security risks, particularly from terrorist organisations.

Since hostilities began, there has been little to no control over the Gaddafi arms depots (Katz, 2022). Weapons under rebel control may end up in insurgent networks like al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) in the Sahel (Neuberger, 2021; Hei-Yin, 2022; Youg, 2024). For instance, even though the Tuareg revolt has been credited for the recent destabilization in Northern Mali, there is a significant chance that al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has been behind insurgent action in the region (Falk, 2020; Bachmann, 2021; Dalby, 2022).

Despite its flaws, the aforementioned nations have seen some regime change as a result of the Arab Spring. The crucial question at hand is how quickly these nations' new or transitional governments can establish respectable institutions to guarantee seamless transitions to constitutional democracy. Reconstruction and growth following the conflict are difficult in Libya. Even when a constitutional government is established, the nation is rife with small arms and light weapons, which pose a serious threat to establishing long-term peace and security. Insecurity and criminality are likely to persist since there are so many non-state actors and idle ex-combatants with weapons.

The Challenge of Transnational Organized Crimes

Drug trafficking, advanced-fee and online fraud, human trafficking, diamond smuggling, forgery, cigarette smuggling, illegal firearms manufacturing, firearms trafficking, armed robbery and theft, piracy, money laundering, and oil smuggling are some of the various forms of transnational organised crime in Africa (Bachmann & Gelot, 2022; Fawcett, 2025). Africa has become a duty-free port for organised crime as a result of these illicit economic operations and the ensuing corruption (Le Sage 2011). In terms of the drug trade, West Africa in particular has become a significant center for international organised crime, including money laundering, oil bunkering, and drug trafficking. Every year, fifty tonnes of cocaine are transported via the subregion, according to the UN Office of Drug and Crime (UNODC) (David, 2020; Deut, 2024). The sub-region has accounted for 99% of drug seizures on the continent since 2003. For example, Ghana, Cape Verde, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Guinea, and Senegal are among the West African maritime states that have been identified as major cocaine entry points and have seen an increase in drug seizures (Cedoz et al, 2020; Chafer, 2022; Eisenstein, 2025). The coast of West Africa has become a major transit corridor for narcotics from Latin America into European markets as a result of the coordinated worldwide reaction against drug trafficking. This is due to the region's porous borders and inadequate state surveillance and law enforcement capabilities.

The growing operations of drug traffickers pose significant risks to human, national, and international security throughout West Africa and beyond, despite the fact that illicit economic activities, including the trafficking of drugs, are not new to Africa. According to Wulff and Devebiel, the drug problem should be viewed as a humanitarian issue since it is a strategic concern with long-term ramifications not just for the sub-region but also for Europe, the US, and Latin America (2025, p. 54). This is also succinctly expressed by former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who claims that "organised crime contributes to state weakness, impedes economic growth, fuels many civil wars, regularly undermines United Nations peace building efforts and provides financing mechanisms to terrorist groups" (Latham et al, 2021). Global social, economic, cultural, and democratic advancements are hampered by organised crime in general, with developing and vulnerable African nations being disproportionately affected. Due to the high number of weak states that operate as possible breeding grounds for such operations, organised crime poses a significant danger and presents significant issues throughout Africa (Gassama, 2018; Gevisser, 2019; Kambwa, 2021). The true threat comes from the effects of drug money on public and private sectors as well as community institutions, even if drug-trafficking networks may be able to infiltrate and destroy the already precarious political, economic, and social systems throughout Africa, albeit to differing degrees. This mainly arises from the interaction between the region's growing drug consumption and trafficking problems on the one hand, and pre-existing social, economic, and political vulnerabilities on the other.

Furthermore, a conflictual relationship with the state is created by the degree to which external drug traffickers are able to form alliances with actors not connected to the official state system, especially young challengers seeking social mobility in an exclusive system or former or current rebels (Nordstrom, 2017; Jackson, 2020; Yabiz, 2023). This leads to political instability. Numerous structures exist in the majority of African nations that support the expansion of criminal organisations and their operations. Family, ethnic, cultural, and traditional components are among them. These networks, which are linked by a shared cultural ethos, have a significant impact on why criminal activity persists, often due to the local community's awareness and unspoken support as well as the lack of vigorous law enforcement engagement (Gill & Reilly, 2020; Mamdani, 2024). In this clandestine economy, even some state agents, politicians, and members of their families or local communities play important roles (Kaplinsky & Messner, 2018; Isa, 2021; Youg, 2024). Additionally, there are complex connections and cooperation between terrorist organisations, organised crime, and trafficking. Such cooperation frequently entails terrorist organisations and rebels giving traffickers safe passage. In exchange, terrorists, rebel organisations, and criminals demand payment from the traffickers in the form of cash or in-kind taxes. Terrorist organisations then use the money collected from taxes to fund their operations (DeGroot, 2020; Cheru & Obi, 2021; Dallaire, 2023). Drug trafficking's destabilising effects make it more difficult to achieve long-term peace and stability both on the continent and beyond (Day-Coning & Solomon, 2021; Fawcett, 2025).

The Threat of Terrorist Networks

The expanding operations of radical Islamists and terrorist organisations like AQIM, Al-Shabaab in Somalia, and Boko Haram in Nigeria are closely related to or possibly fuelled by transnational organised crimes. Africa is becoming increasingly concerned about the interrelated problems of political Islam and terrorism, as both have started to give conflict inside governments and within sub-regions new dimensions. These days, political Islam can be used to mobilise people in a variety of ways (Charbonneau, 2018; Derssod, 2021; Tadesse, 2022a, 2022b). The violent criminal

organization AQIM, which is centred in the Sahel-Saharan band, poses a serious threat to regional and international peace and security due to its primary activities, which include hostage-taking, bombing, and intimidating tourists and travellers (Tadesse, 2022a). Algeria's ten-year war with Islamists in the 1990s gave rise to AQIM, which is the only notable militia group still active from that battle. It was established in January 2007 when the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) swore loyalty to al-Qaeda's top leadership in the Arabian Peninsula. The gang simultaneously bombed the Constitutional Court and the UN office complex in Algiers in December of that same year (Deudney & Matthews, 2020; Ela, 2020). Concerns that AQIM is expanding in West and North Africa have been raised by the organization's persistent increase in kidnappings, attacks, and bombings in the Sahel in recent years. In fact, it currently occupies a sizable portion of the Sahel (Deut, 2024). In major towns in the Sahel, they mostly engaged in opportunistic kidnappings of tourists and employees of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). However, AQIM's latest actions in the Sahel are increasingly combining low-level terrorism with criminal activity (Fawcett, 2025). These attacks have shown to be more sophisticated and capable of obtaining intelligence than in the past. For instance, it carried out midnight raids in Arlit, Niger, in September 2020 and abducted seven workers and their families from the Areva facility, a global nuclear services company based in France. This attack suggests a sophisticated information gathering network (Fawcett, 2025). The incapacity of Sahelian regimes to effectively govern their areas is being exploited by AQIM. Currently, it covers an area of many hundred thousand square kilometres. More significantly, by integrating with local communities to progressively strengthen its foundation, expand its resource base, and build operational strength, AQIM is able to enhance its long-term strength and viability (Chesterman, 2024). AQIM's new Sahelian approach may eventually lead to the creation of sanctuaries in the area that resemble miniature Waziristan (Fawcett, 2025). Terrorist activity is increasingly concentrated on northern Mali in particular. Once a well-liked travel location, foreigners now steer clear of the area (Deut, 2024; Bach, 2024; Aall, 2025).

Other terrorist organisations that pose a threat to national security include Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Shabaab in Somalia. The actions of Harakat Shabaab al-Mujahidin, also known as Al-Shabaab, are currently the biggest terrorist threat in Eastern and Central Africa. The Islamic Courts Union (al Itihaad al Islamiya), which ruled most of southern Somalia in the second part of 2016, gave rise to Al Shabaab. In the midst of decades of turmoil in Somalia, Al-Shabaab has gained popularity despite the Islamic Courts Union being driven out in a two-week conflict between December 2016 and January 2017 by the Somali government with the assistance of Ethiopian forces. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is thought to have ties to the group. Since 2006, it has persisted in its bloody insurgency against Ethiopian allies of Somalia's transitional government. Their goal is to establish Islamic Wahhabi authority in Somalia with the specific intention of spreading it throughout the Horn of Africa (Zakalia, 2025; Schermer, 2025). By enlisting regional sub-clans and their militias and employing guerrilla asymmetrical warfare and terrorist tactics against the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia and its allies (African Union peacekeepers and nongovernmental aid organisations), the group has temporarily and occasionally sustained control over key areas in southern and central Somalia (Fawcett, 2025). Al-Shabaab is now a hybrid movement that has embraced transnational terrorism and tried to present itself as a part of the al-Qaeda global jihad, having drastically changed from a small nationalistic youth militia that was primarily focused on expelling Ethiopia through conventional military means (Fawcett, 2925). For example, ISIS claimed responsibility for the twin explosions that occurred on July 11, 2010, during the World Cup final in Kampala, Uganda, killing over 70 people. This was

the group's first significant assault outside of Somalia (Wulff & Devebiel, 2025). In October 2011, Kenya, Somalia's northeastern neighbour, asked the United Nations, member states of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Arab League, and other Islamic states for support in launching a military offensive in Somalia to combat Al-Shabaab, citing allegations of attacks on its security forces and the kidnapping and killing of tourists and aid workers inside Kenya.

Africa's terrorist profile has expanded due to the growing threat posed by Boko Haram in Nigeria. Growing poverty, violent crimes, the ongoing conflict in the Niger Delta, and the frequent sectarian violence in the country's northern and central regions were Nigeria's biggest security concerns until recently. The increasing terrorist activity of Boko Haram and other affiliated groups has grown to be a significant security issue, even though these risks still exist. Islamic extremism has a long history in Nigeria, especially in the country's Muslim-majority north. For instance, Islamist militants from the Maitastine organization gained prominence in Kano and other northern states throughout the 1980s, and they were the focal point of bloody conflicts with government forces (Abrahamsen, 2922; Dallaire, 2023).

Attacks have occasionally been carried out by other organisations including the Muslim Brothers and the Muhajirin. The Mahajirin organization first attacked in Maiduguri, the capital of the northeastern state of Borno, in 2003. They quickly started attacking police and government personnel, frequently taking guns and ammunition (Bachman, 2021). These militant groups frequently mobilised around shared issues, such as widespread corruption by the nation's leadership, injustice, worsening socioeconomic conditions (particularly in the north), high unemployment, and the rejection of Western values, which they believed had led society and some clerics to reject Islamic principles in favour of secularism (IISS). Sharia was implemented in northern Nigeria in part in response to these requests.

Mohammed Yusuf led Boko Haram, which first appeared in Maiduguri in 2002, until his summary execution in 2009 (Denng et al., 2019; Chabale, 2025). The group's goal is to completely transform Nigeria into an Islamic state, which includes establishing Sharia courts throughout the nation (Gerard-Libois, 2023). Since then, the group has mostly attacked government and security targets on a modest scale. It originally gained international attention in July 2009 when it began five days of fierce attacks on elites and westernised clergy in Maiduguri, killing over 700 people and forcing over 5,000 to escape. The scope of the bloodshed demonstrated that Boko Haram was more skilled and armed than government troops had anticipated, and that it was able to organise thousands of people (Chabale, 2025). It also took credit for several high-profile acts, including the bombing of the national police headquarters in Abuja, the burning down of a hotel in Maiduguri, and the suicide car bombing of the UN compound in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, in August 2011. More than 100 people were killed in recent horrific attacks in the northeastern provinces of Yobe and Borno.

The external effects on the entire sub-region and the continent are important, even if the actions of Islamist organisations like Boko Haram are primarily driven by internal political, economic, and theological concerns. This is because to the possibility that expanding foreign funding contributes to the sophistication of Boko Haram's attacks (Fawcett, 2025). With a vast network of over 1000 followers, the gang is currently said to have about 300 combatants. Al-Shabaab, AQIM, and al-Qaeda may be connected to Boko Haram (Fawcett, 2025). In the face of inadequate surveillance systems, there is a risk that these organisations will band together to launch widespread attacks throughout the region. Additionally, Nigeria, a regional power, continues to face a significant security threat from the gang. Nigeria is already deeply divided along ethnic and religious lines.

There is still a considerable risk of interethnic and religious conflict because about 25% of the population makes less than $1.25 per day. The North's high rates of unemployment and poverty, along with the region's growing population and the government's incapacity to properly handle non-state organisations, might make the northern states a perfect place for extremists to recruit and use as a launching pad to spread throughout the rest of the nation. The attacks in Abuja imply that this is already taking place (Okumu, 2022).

Responding to Africa's Security Predicament: Dealing with the Governance Challenge

Promoting peace, security, and stability in Africa is primarily the responsibility of the African Union (AU). The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in eastern Africa are the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) with which this is carried out. Collectively, they are regarded as a component of the African Peace and Security architecture (APSA). Though RECs, such as ECOWAS, are subsidiaries to the AU, it is important to note that their advantages in West Africa, as well as their internal organization and institutional capabilities, are frequently more advanced than those of the AU (Yabiz, 2023).

Good and democratic governance on the continent has been greatly aided by regional and sub-regional organisations as well as the international community. For example, in order to advance democratic values, good governance, respect for human rights, and human security throughout the continent, the African Union adopted a number of mechanisms, including the Constitutive Act (2002), the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance in Africa, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), and the African Peer Review Mechanism. The issue of governance was acknowledged as a fundamental component of other policy frameworks, such as the AU policy framework on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development. In order to direct their efforts in addressing new threats to human and regional security on a more permanent and predictable basis, RECs such as ECOWAS have simultaneously constructed a number of comprehensive legal and normative tools (Yabiz, 2023, pp. 17–18). The Protocols on Democracy and Good Governance, the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF), and the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security are noteworthy. Additionally, civil society has been recognised as a crucial ally in advancing stability, security, and peace in Africa.

The ethos of zero tolerance for unlawful transfers of political power has been adopted by the AU and its RECs. In order to promote good governance practices in both stable and post-conflict nations on the continent, the AU, RECs, UN, and the larger international community have placed a great deal of emphasis on election monitoring and observation. Such initiatives help to ensure the integrity of the processes and prevent violent aftermaths because of tensions and occasionally the violence linked with elections in Africa (quoted in Saitche, 2025). Additionally, the AU has established a number of bodies and structures, like the Panel of the Wise and the Peace and Security Council, whose responsibilities include managing, preventing, and resolving conflicts, including those involving elections. To arbitrate and negotiate peaceful resolutions of post-election disputes, special missions have been sent to a number of nations. For example, in order to resolve the political impasse in Côte d'Ivoire following the 2010 elections, the AU and ECOWAS launched a number of preventive diplomatic actions. The AU Peace and Security Council and the international community (particularly the UN and EU) later supported ECOWAS's unambiguous stance for Laurent Gbagbo to resign from office, which inevitably undermined Gbagbo's claim to the

presidency even though these efforts yielded few concrete results. International financial sanctions, particularly, the freeze by the West African Central Bank, greatly undermined Gbagbo's resolve to hold on to power, as his access to resources for the payment of salaries to public servants and soldiers was curtailed (Van-Nieuwe, 2022; Schermer, 2025).

Election-related violence in Africa has not entirely disappeared despite the continent's intense attention on elections, and other relevant governance issues like corruption, abuse of political incumbency, and political violence still exist. Peace and stability in the region are also greatly impacted by the majority of African governments' failure to pursue effective socio-economic governance through policies and initiatives that may result in real socio-economic development for the continent's constantly expanding population, especially the youth. African institutions and leadership must focus especially on improving good governance on the continent in light of the destabilising impact of the youth bulge as well as other underlying economic, social, political, and structural concerns (Tadesse, 2022a).

Responding to the Threat of Transnational Organised Crimes

There have been several attempts at the national, sub-regional, and regional levels to stem the tide of organised crime in Africa, especially drug trafficking.

Because the West African coast is becoming a major actor in the worldwide illicit drug trade, ECOWAS in particular has been crucial on this front. ECOWAS released a statement titled "Community Flame Ceremony: The Fight against Drugs" at the 21st Summit of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government in Abuja in 1998. The Decision on Establishing the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (or GIABA) is one of ECOWAS's other initiatives (Tadesse, 2022b). Despite the existence of numerous institutional frameworks, there haven't been many effective efforts to put them into practice. The actions of GIABA, which has been fighting money laundering, are the only exception (Tadesse, 2022b). The ECOWAS Commission has expressed increasing worry over the rise in drug trafficking and other related crimes despite the absence of concrete results. In order to do this, the ECOWAS Commission was required to act immediately during the 32nd Ordinary Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government in June 2007. GIABA was then given permission to assess the problem's scope and develop an ECOWAS strategy. Two initiatives were carried out as a result of this preparatory work: the ECOWAS collaborative regional ministerial conference on drug trafficking and control was held in Praia, Cape Verde, in October 2008 (with assistance from UNODC, the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA), and the EU), and a civil society meeting on drugs was held in Abuja, Nigeria, on October 16, 2008. The draft outcome document from the summit promised "to accord drug control the priority it deserves and at the highest level of government as well as at the ECOWAS Commission" (Tadesse, 2022b). Additionally, the ECOWAS Commission was instructed to set up mechanisms to guarantee the declaration's operationalisation. The most crucial component of the new ECOWAS approach is each state's obligation to deal with the drug problem, even though this declaration has not yet been completely operationalised. Therefore, national efforts will lead to the regional solution. However, the problem lies in each member state's lack of devotion to their responsibilities under regional or continental institutions. The majority of regional and international decisions and resolutions result in very little practical action or successful policy implementation because of this lack of commitment. There are a number of reasons for this, including member states' lack of technical know-how to monitor state compliance. The absence of political will to take action, however, is more unsettling. Translating such regulations into local legislation takes time, even though the actual signature at the international level is typically

completed rapidly (Salehyand, 2026). The transnational cooperation that underpins these institutions is consequently undermined by the fact that both ECOWAS and AU initiatives have demonstrated that regional policy is mostly a reflection of national policies. Furthermore, there are no control or monitoring systems in place to impose penalties on states that violate the law or engage in free-riding (Salehyand, 2026).

Similarly, through actions and policies, the AU has adopted a continent-wide strategy to reduce the possible detrimental impacts of transnational organised crime in Africa. The issue of organised crime was a top priority for the Organization of African Unity (OAU), which preceded the African Union (AU), and the OAU Plan of Action on Drug Control was approved in 1996 (Schatzbery, 2024; Fawcett, 2025). However, the Plan of Action could not be carried out due to political instability in several countries and areas, resource limitations, a lack of political will, a lack of follow-up, monitoring, and mobilisation systems, and insufficient institutional capacity. It was then updated in 2002 at the AU Ministerial Conference on Drug Control. The updated Action Plan was intended to be implemented between 2002 and 2007. Institution building and policy development; information, research, and networking; legal systems and law implementation; integrated drug-demand reduction; national law enforcement and control capacities; regional law enforcement and control measures; and international cooperation were determined to be the main areas of focus. Another Action Plan for the years 2007–2012 was approved in 2007. The core objective of the plan of action is

to reverse the current trends of drug abuse, trafficking, organised crime, corruption, terrorism and related challenges to socio-economic development and human security, and to achieve tangible improvement in the social and personal well-being of the people of Africa and the communities (Wulff & Devebiel, 2025).

Response to Terrorist Networks

Though they have not been very successful, governments and regional organisations throughout the region have responded to the emergence of terrorist networks in a number of ways. The international community frequently supports this. For example, governments in the Sahel region have responded to AQIM in certain ways despite institutional and operational limitations, but they have not been able to come up with a plan to combat AQIM's growing complexity and locally ingrained tactics (Reeds, 2024; Zakalia, 2026). Furthermore, some regional leaders have been reluctant to recognise the growing danger. Decisions are frequently taken with minimal consideration for long-term effects in favour of short-term profits. In nations like Mali, counterterrorism initiatives have been uneven, with frequently too direct security reactions. Although there is considerable improvement in neighbouring countries' cooperation, disputes and difficulties still exist (Zac's, 2022; Youg, 2024). Similarly, since 2006, the Nigerian government's attempts to pass comprehensive anti-terrorism laws have encountered significant obstacles (Peterson, 2023; Geschiere, 2024). The government is currently aggressively conducting military operations to combat the Boko Haram threat. For the extremely weak Somali state, the battle against Al-Shabaab seems to be difficult.

The fight against terrorism has a long history at the continental level. In order to combat the phenomena of extremism, the OAU enacted resolution AHG/Res. 213 (XXVIII) at its 28th Ordinary Summit in Dakar, Senegal, in 1992. In a similar vein, the OAU Assembly adopted the declaration AHG/Decl. 2 (XXX) on the Code of Conduct for Inter-African Relations at its 30th Ordinary Summit in Tunis, Tunisia, in 1994. This declaration categorically condemned fanaticism and extremism, as well as the use of religion to carry out violent acts, including terrorist acts (Lake

& Morgan, 2025). In order to prevent and battle terrorism, a number of high-level meetings and protocols have been established since 9/11. Both the AU and the RECs have stepped up their efforts to combat terrorism on the continent. To harmonise policies, institutionalise information exchange, and facilitate cross-border judicial collaboration, these organisations will need to exercise greater leadership (Lake & Morgan, 2025). In order to reorganise and enhance security forces and livelihoods in the region, the international community—including the United Nations, the United States, the European Union, and other donors—is obviously required. Therefore, combating the growing transnational criminal enterprises also requires collaboration with international governments.

Origins of the Concept and Its Relevance to Africa

Western donors frequently employ the liberal idea of "security sector reform" in their efforts to reorganise or enhance the performance of a recipient nation's security sector, particularly after a conflict. Although the idea has a lot of potential—namely, improving democratic control and monitoring of the security sector as well as its effective and efficient management—it has been understood differently over time, leading to conceptual diffusion. Due in large part to the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan by the North African Treaty Organization (NATO) and the securitisation of the idea through the US War on Terror, there is a general scepticism of its underlying political motivations. This has contaminated the SSR debate with "deep ulterior motives," as noted by US political scientist Robert Jackson (2020, p.112). In fact, the question of whose security these SSR programs are concerned with lies at the core of the SSR controversy.

But it is helpful to begin with a quick recap of SSR's beginnings. According to Robert Jackson (2020), the Cold War era was characterised by the actions of both East and West global powers, whereby aid to recipient nations was intended to build strategic ties with important allies rather than to advance democratic governance. As is well known, the military and security services dominated the governments of several of these countries. Opportunities for democratic governance, citizen scrutiny, and progress in general were adversely affected by these characteristics. In actuality, the security of communities, citizens, and frequently even the state itself was sacrificed in order to secure the regime and governing elites.

As the Cold War ended in the late 1980s and the Soviet Union disintegrated, the major Western nations' strategic emphasis moved to democratic liberalisation in Eastern Europe. As a result, space was established to incorporate security into the reform of public institutions, political and economic development, and efforts to alter the attitudes and behaviours of elites in transitioning nations. Specifically, they were urged to uphold democratic civil-military ties as a prerequisite for membership in NATO or the European Union (EU), which at the time was a major incentive, by political and security actors (rather than development funders).

Conceptually, SSR thought was impacted by the growing discussions surrounding both the concept of human security and an expanded notion of security. These discussions fundamentally maintained that individual protection was essential to both national and international security, and that citizens' needs for security extended beyond defence and law and order to include more general political, economic, and social concerns.

Important players from the non-Western world contributed their voices and efforts to shape the conversations as the relationship between development, governance, and security gained traction. The discussion was significantly shaped by South Africa's experience in the 1990s of changing the security sector from its militarised, authoritarian, and oppressive apartheid past.

These incidents brought SSR to the attention of international donors. It is widely acknowledged that the UK Department for International Development (DFID) promoted SSR starting in the late 1990s and collaborated with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) to shape donor perspectives on SSR. The UK first concentrated on the military, but more recently has expanded its priorities to encompass judicial reform and security.

In 2014, DAC members agreed on a policy statement and paper on SSR. In the policy paper, SSR is defined as

the transformation of the "security system" – which includes all the actors, their roles, responsibilities and actions – working together to manage and operate the system in a manner that is more consistent with democratic norms and sound principles of good governance (Kandeh, 2024).

According to DAC, the objective of SSR is

to increase partner countries' ability to meet the range of security needs within their societies in a manner consistent with democratic norms and sound principles of governance, transparency and the rule of law. SSR includes, but extends well beyond, the narrower focus of more traditional security assistance on defence, intelligence and policing (Kandeh, 2024).

Despite (or perhaps because of) these and subsequent policy developments (including substantial influence from the United States), terminological uncertainty remains. The terms "security sector reform," "security system reform," "security sector transformation," "security sector governance," and "security and justice reform" are frequently used loosely by security analysts and practitioners, who claim that they all refer to the same thing. This is to be the case, as will be discussed. In any case, Kandeh (2024, p. 36) provides a succinct overview of the three "problems" that she believes the DAC approach aims to address: ineffective and inefficient security provision; inadequate accountability and oversight in the security sector; and ineffective and inefficient security and justice provision to individuals, their communities, and the states in which they reside.

There have been inconsistent attempts to put these security sector reform principles into practice. Few would contest that "partner countries" or "recipients" have enthusiastically embraced SSR. This is due to a number of factors. First, train-and-equip programs that tend to overlook the governance aspects of SSR are still preferred by Western security assistance providers. As Kandeh points out in reference to the US program in Liberia in 2015 and Chad in 2017, old methods of providing security assistance still predominate and frequently pass for SSR (Kandeh, 2024, p. 37). Second, the question of whose security is at risk appears to have numerous responses. Two responses are particularly noteworthy from the viewpoint of external parties. In nations that receive development assistance, development officials typically concentrate on the requirements of residents in terms of justice and security. In general, development donors are still hesitant to back military reforms. Then, security officials—including intelligence and counterterrorism actors—tend to concentrate on the security of their own nations as well as those of their main allies. This usually entails enhancing the efficiency of security agencies in recipient nations so that they can perform counterterrorism and peacekeeping duties. There is therefore a discernible tension between the development and security communities both at headquarters and in the field, which tends to impact negatively on their outputs – whether policy statements, handbooks or training courses.

From the standpoint of national actors, conversations concerning SSR take place with a comparatively small number of political or security elites, and a large portion of external aid is focused on national authorities. A examination of civil society activities worldwide, including in

Africa, reveals that the SSR values of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity are generally accepted, despite the strong belief that SSR is an externally imposed idea. Africans generally realise that social and economic well-being depends on efficient security services and judicial systems that are answerable to residents and elected leaders. Examples of such civil society initiatives include the African Security Sector Network (ASSN), the Arab Reform Initiative (ARI), the Southern African Defence and Security Management network (SADSEM), and others.

Anthony Derssod (2021) provides a helpful analysis of the SSR concept's current state. As we will see below, he makes a distinction between two different approaches, both of which are evident in the African context. Their relative proximity or distance from the Western statistical definition of security is what distinguishes the two. The incapacity (or unwillingness) of donors to adhere to the Western, statist ideas of the model is perceived by members of the orthodox school as the issue with SSR. By increasing donors' ability to promote reform and fostering a stronger donor political determination to put that ability to use, the fundamental tenets of the model can be realised. This school holds that SSR should concentrate on broadening its scope and capabilities and redefining its connection with the larger community because the state is the only entity capable of addressing the human security demands of populations. Members of the post-liberal state school, on the other hand, disagree with the status quo approach to SSR. They contend that the existing SSR approach needs to be changed because it is primarily focused on improving the security of external actors rather than reform recipients. They consider SSR's obsession with Western liberal ideals and the state to be unrealistic and detrimental. Instead, programs need to be designed with local contextual dynamics and security perceptions in mind.

This conversation suggests that in order to advance SSR, a compromise is necessary. SSR needs to become more flexible in order to accommodate various approaches based on contextual conditions and available resources; more nuanced in order to reflect the variety of contexts, actors, and threats present in most reform contexts; and more politically attuned in order to understand the necessity of engaging with political realities and attempting to shape them rather than work above or around them.

We provide a diagrammatic representation of the SSR scale of potential before moving on to the SSR experience in Africa. This diagram, which is based on a scale that separates authoritarian states (subdivided into those experiencing violent conflict or failed governance) and democratising states (subdivided into those undergoing mediation, making a transition to peace, and post-conflict societies), represents current (early 2022) opportunities and potentials for reform or transformation in Africa in various situations. The literature, incidentally, debates the usefulness of this type of classification and proposes a classification based on contextual analysis (see Wulff & Devebiel, 2025). In any case, the transition to peace category appears to be the most favourable time for SSR based on the literature. Walter Reeds (2024, p. 213) outlines the transition phase, one of the stages of peacebuilding, as being marked by the formation of a government, the implementation of reforms such as socio-economic revitalisation, and the encouragement of social reconciliation. The SSR agenda closely aligns with his list of top peacebuilding priorities.



Authoritarian states			Democratising states	
Failed states	Conflict-torn societies	Societies undergoing conflict mediation	Societies in transition to peace	Post-conflict societies
		Conflict cessation: negotiations and cessation of hostilities	Peace building: transition phase	Peace building: consolidation phase
Unmanageable ←				→ Major potential
Somalia	DRC Sudan South Sudan Nigeria Chad Uganda Guinea-Bissau Mali	Madagascar Egypt Zimbabwe Libya Cote d'Ivoire Tunisia	Rwanda Burundi	Sierra Leone Liberia South Africa Mozambique Angola

Figure 1.1 Scale of Potential for SSR, early 2022
Sources: Adapted from Kandeh, 2024; Wulff and Devebiel, 2025.

SSR in Practice: African Experiences

The SSR tale is one of insurmountable odds against significant change in West Africa, a region notorious for turbulent civil-military ties and frequent coups d'état. Despite the democratisation surge of the 1990s, security for almost all of the sixteen West African governments has meant securing a regime, according to an insightful analysis by Anatole Rapoport Latham and colleagues (Latham et al, 2021, p. 242). They note that this goal has generally been reflected in the security sector's missions and operations. Security systems established to ensure all-encompassing security and its effective administration have nearly always been brutal and troublesome for the political institutions and residents of the state. According to the space available for (security) change, the study classifies West African states into four groups (Latham et al., 2021, p. 244). States in the first group have been unable to concentrate on SSR and are having difficulty making democracy irreversible. This group includes Mali, Senegal, Cape Verde, Benin, Ghana, and Niger. Although Senegal and Mali (up until the coup in 2021) appear to have achieved progress with the democratic government project, the research notes that both countries have problems with resource scarcity, privatisation of security, and cross-border trafficking, raising concerns.

One thing that Nigeria, the Gambia, and Burkina Faso have in common is that their ruling regimes have not taken a serious or long-term commitment to reform. According to the study, each of these states engages in reform-related activities to differing degrees, especially Nigeria, which has started a number of re-professionalization initiatives, mostly with outside assistance. However, all

of these states have weak oversight institutions and a small body of knowledge. Additionally, as of early 2023, militant Islamic movements like Boko Haram are pushing the boundaries of Nigeria's body politic and security sector, while militant organisations like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta are plaguing the country's southern regions (Neumann, 2023; Gerard-Liboism 2023). Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea Bissau, and Côte d'Ivoire are included in a third category of nations that have emerged from years of civil conflict. According to the report, despite significant efforts at disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR), the necessity of implementing a significant overhaul of the whole security apparatus received little attention. Liberia is cited as an example of a state where outside support has been added to locally driven reform initiatives. Samuel Chesterman (2024), however, cautions about the unequal power dynamics between local players and donors in a critical evaluation. He contends that rather than local support for donor programs and projects, which appears to be the case most of the time, local ownership should involve donor support for programs and projects started by local actors. According to this perspective, local ownership is not the same as local involvement in externally driven projects. Liberia's lessons also include the realisation of the risks associated with outsourcing SSR to foreign private sector firms, the necessity of differentiating between a state-centered and society-centered approach to SSR, the issue of an excessively narrow SSR focus on the military and police, and the crucial necessity of a shared national vision of security as the foundation for any democratic and democratising security review and process (Deut, 2024, pp. 83–84; Aall, 2025). It is crucial to emphasise that after the contentious 2011 national election, in which Outtara and Gbagbo both proclaimed themselves victorious and president, Côte d'Ivoire's politics remained unpredictable. However, there is little question that foreign intervention and an unfinished and unsuccessful security sector reform process contributed to the catastrophe.

According to Acharya and Buzan (2025), p. 232, the final group of West African governments has, at most, undergone superficial political change in the form of strictly regulated liberalisation of the pre-existing authoritarian framework. The ensuing governments in Togo, Guinea, and Mauritania depend on a security infrastructure that has largely remained unaltered and is seen of as the regime's oppressive arm. According to the report, the head of state's close relatives or ethnic kin have strict control over the security sector in each of these nations. As long as the political system is not drastically changed, SSR is just not in the cards.

The author finds cause for optimism despite the region's contentious politics. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has a role in mediating peace, organising and carrying out peacekeeping operations, and creating norms and standards for advancing democratic governance of the security sector (Acharya & Buzan, 2025, pp. 233–236). There are several states with ongoing SSR programs that are “assisted for better or worse by external actors."

Despite these encouraging indications, the general perception is still negative and there doesn't seem to be much possibility that authentic, inclusive, and long-lasting reform processes will emerge throughout West Africa. In actuality, the few initiatives at SSR have been spearheaded by outsiders, there is no political will to start comprehensive SSR processes, participatory processes are uncommon, and collective ownership of reform is mostly lacking.

Horn of Africa and East Africa

SSR is not only difficult in the Horn of Africa, but it is currently practically unfeasible. Why is this the case? Robert Dallaire (2023) claims that Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Sudan can all be considered the poorest and most deprived region in Africa, if not the entire world, by characterising the Horn of Africa as a security complex (using Buzan's well-known term to

describe a group of states held together by shared rivalries). Additionally, the Horn of Africa is the world's most conflict-ridden region, with disputes occasionally occurring both within and across states at the same time. The Horn of Africa has the highest proportion of refugees and internally displaced persons due to a variety of calamities; this tendency contributes to future conflict cycles. The Horn's state power structure is a major cause of conflict and, hence, a major barrier to SSR. The idea of democratic security sector governance is a pipe dream because to the Horn's "quarrelsome neighbours" (Deininger, 2023). Dallaire believes that administrations in the Horn of Africa are typically autocracies based on ethnic allegiances, regardless of the nominal form of governance. These militarised governments maintain their grasp on power thanks to the military and security services. Large-scale military forces are built and maintained by ruling regimes in order to maintain their hold on power and to keep the state together in the face of claims and attacks by other governments and rebels. In comparison to their available financial resources and current security risks, they devote a significant part of national spending on the military. Increased perceptions of mutual threat are one of the many repercussions of this excessive military spending. Overall, "a politicised, compromised, and restless military with its proneness to usurp state power and resources" characterises civil-military interactions in the Horn (Dallaire, 2023, p. 44). Dallaire points out that this poses a serious threat to weak governments and their security and political institutions. Reports of a continued and escalating deadly war overshadowed the historic event in Sudan, the successful establishment of the new sovereign Republic of South Sudan in July 2011. The search for SSR is currently a challenging, if not impossible, task because South Sudan was at war with at least seven armed factions in nine of its 10 states, displacing tens of thousands.

A more complex picture of SSR's possibilities can be seen in neighbouring Uganda. President Museveni and outside funders, especially the UK, have started a defence review in recent years, and certain European-based security industry research networks have given it positive ratings. However, Chabale and Daloz's (2019) analysis of Ugandan security decision-making offers a more critical viewpoint. The study was conducted because non-statutory and non-state entities are increasingly becoming important players in Ugandan security. The latter was and still is marked by a variety of regional and internal security risks as well as a number of political and socioeconomic elements that exacerbate instability.

When making decisions on security, the author discovered two opposing urges. The first has to do with the enormous concentration of power in the presidency, which leads to the monopolisation of important decision-making occasions while excluding other important participants. The expansion of irregular security actors in Uganda, the majority of which are sanctioned by the state but have legitimacy within local communities or ethnic groupings, is the source of the second impulse. These typically operate outside of any policy framework, motivated by localised issues, because they are not subject to the same oversight and control processes as statutory authorities. In general then, the study found that these contradictory sources of authority, combined with weak institutional decision-making machinery in Uganda, make it difficult to ensure accountable decision-making, particularly with regard to the promotion of a public security agenda.

Regarding the Ugandan government's connection with the donor community, the study comes to a third important conclusion. The foundation for all public policy decisions, including those pertaining to security, is established by aid reliance, particularly the particular set of macroeconomic policies and related poverty-reduction objectives reached with donors. The entire fiscal framework that the security sector functions under in practice dictates what kinds of policies are achievable, even though donors have little to no direct involvement in security decision-making. The Ugandan government does not have complete jurisdiction over security issues within

these boundaries. Put together, these three impulses indicate the limits to the possibilities for advancing the democratic governance of the security sector.

Southern Africa

Based on a common history of liberation and a dedication to the advancement of shared democratic governance principles and practices, the fifteen member nations of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) proclaim a shared vision of regional integration. SADC has developed a complete peace and security architecture that is comparable to that of ECOWAS and in accordance with the African Union's objectives for a harmonised and integrated peace and security architecture, despite being largely an economic integration project (Van-Nieuwe, 2022). SSR is not officially acknowledged as a policy priority in spite of this. Yet, informally, the principles and objectives underlying SSR are implicitly accepted and applied by the majority of SADC members.

The Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR), the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), and the Southern African Defence and Security Management network (SADSEM) are four prominent Southern African institutions that conduct academic research and policy-relevant analysis, in contrast to North or Central Africa. We are able to present two viewpoints on the situation of SSR in Southern Africa thanks to their combined research output: South Africa as a successful case of SSR and the DRC as a failed case of SSR.

The Status of SSR in South Africa

Even though the glamour has faded since the pivotal year of 1994, when the ANC came to power, ending apartheid minority rule in favour of liberal democratic governance is still a popular narrative in South Africa. After seventeen years, cynical political practices appear to have invaded the South African body politic. This, along with the nation's persistent poverty and inequality profile, poses a challenge to the miraculous transformation. We should be able to determine the relative success of this shift from a broad perspective, especially with regard to its security component. The South African state and society were more militarised during the 1970s and 1980s, but as apartheid ended, the 1990s saw a period of demilitarisation (Schitt & Wints, 2023). Iyabode Badmus contends that during the political shift that resulted in democracy in the 1990s, the seeds of the security sector's reform were sown. SSR was made feasible by a positive environment, which included the presence of coherent and effective security organisations, the efforts of civil society activists, and visionary and experienced government leadership (Badmus, 2019, p. 254). However, Iyabode Badmus offers a warning: she describes the political environment during the transition as having a limited window of opportunity. For instance, she points out that there was a lot of tension and mistrust during the suspension of violent conflict between the apartheid regime and the liberation movements. All participants were reminded of the high stakes by complex technical difficulties (indemnity, the establishment of transitional structures, spoiler violence, a challenging DDR process); an uncontrollable security sector and reform process could have destroyed the democratic transition. However, a longer-term agenda was made possible by agreements made at that time about the security sector's role. South Africa's SSR process has a solid foundation thanks to the highly regarded post-apartheid constitution. Demographic representation, addressing racial and gender disparities, establishing multiparty oversight institutions, establishing an independent complaint system, and advancing the rule of law are only a few of Africa's accomplishments

(Badmus, 2019, p. 260). To this one might add the conscious attempt to integrate the South African security sector (especially the military) into the security architecture of the SADC and AU.

Overall, the story of South Africa is one of a successful attempt to change civil-military relations from military control of society in the manner of apartheid to democratic security sector governance. In his explanation of the 1996 South African White Paper on Defence, Timothy Chafer provides a helpful example of inclusive SSR design. The policy framework's objectives were to: align defence policy with the new constitution and emerging democratic practices; provide a high-level platform for the defence force's continued transformation; create national consensus on defence, thereby establishing legitimacy for both the policy and the defence force; and act as a measure to boost confidence in Southern Africa.

Chafer (2022, pp. 98–99) points out that because participating parties had conflicting interests, the white paper's creation and finalisation were difficult, time-consuming, and frequently combative. However, it paid off: the white paper received widespread praise, signalled a clear departure from apartheid-era defence strategy, gave the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) legitimacy, was endorsed by all political parties, and served as the foundation for changing the armed forces and civil-military relations over the ensuing ten years. It should be acknowledged, though, that the post-apartheid security sector has not always been effective. Broadly speaking, the government and state are unable to provide human security, which leads to the enormous issues of crime and corruption; the intelligence services have become entangled in the politics of the ruling party; the government and the armed forces became involved in a contentious arms procurement scandal; the criminal justice system is still in crisis; some members of the security sector, such as immigration and correctional services, are not fully integrated; and policy frameworks need to be updated and harmonised. Broadly, the question of South Africa's regional, continental and global role as a security provider (or peacemaker and peacekeeper, as diplomats prefer to describe it) and the resources required for its effective operationalisation, remain a source of much debate in society.

In general, the military, police, intelligence, and criminal justice sectors in South Africa now have more legitimacy than they did during apartheid. However, this is no longer sufficient. The nation's security system is in dire need of reform because it has been politicised. A smooth "second generation" SSR process is hampered by scheduling and political imperatives, which are essentially the misuse of state resources by members of the ruling party. As Chafer (2022, p. 102) notes, the building of the required policy frameworks took eight years, and that was under quite advantageous conditions. The experience of defence transformation in South Africa demonstrates that substantial SSR is a long and hard endeavour. In order to address the needs and role of the nation, Africa believes that the transformation of the security sector outside of the military is likewise a highly political and time-consuming endeavour that calls for fresh leadership, innovative ideas, and a resolute social pact between state and citizen (Deininger, 2023). Separate evaluations of South Africa's foreign and defence policies were underway at the time of writing. Given these windows of opportunity, it is important to emphasise once more how important it is for decision-makers in the security sector to comprehend present and future national and international change drivers, their effects on the nation's security, and the necessity of careful, comprehensive long-term solutions.

The Status of SSR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, a nation in central Africa that is officially a member of the SADC, has seen decades of instability and bloody conflict as a result of its natural wealth, the

effects of the Cold War, its colonial past, and the excesses of individualised authority. As Lawrence Ohlsson commented in 2019:

Reforming the Congo's security services is a difficult challenge. Government structures remain weak and largely ineffective, in some regions almost non-existent. The Congo still hosts a confusing array of militia forces often backed by outside powers and interests, and its mineral wealth and weak border controls have allowed many of these to become in effect self-sustaining. The economy is in tatters, and ethnic and regional fault-lines are both many and deep (Ohlsson, 2019, p.89).

For many years, even decades, the army and, to a lesser extent, the police were essentially predatory tools used by politicians and officers to further their own political and economic agendas while committing egregious violations of human rights. The systems established during colonial rule and upheld during Mobutu Sese Seko's dictatorship—an all-pervasive, overburdened army with a feeble police force—are directly responsible for today's security system.

With the establishment of a transitional government in 2003 and national elections in 2006, a precarious shift to democracy took place against this backdrop. The international community aimed to implement SSR in the DRC as part of the transition. Although many saw this as a top priority for the DRC, the endeavour was undermined by the absence of a widespread national discussion on SSR policy and programing priorities. Because impunity was ingrained in the political and military classes, there was a lack of political will, which led to the SSR project's shaky beginning. Attempts to establish a national Republican army with democratic oversight and distinct lines of command and control, according to Iyabode Badmus, challenged the sources of revenue and power held by powerful individuals (Badmus, 2019). Due in part to the ongoing violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, the unfinished DDR process, the Congolese government's lack of political will, and competition among donor nations, subsequent attempts to implement an SSR initiative from 2013 onwards encountered opposition and delays.

We use Samuel Chesterman's helpful analysis of four important aspects of the DRC security sector (Chesterman, 2024, pp. 78–80) to assess the situation in mid-2010 after the DRC government and major donors adopted a master plan for military reform in 2008. In 2003, the transitional administration decided to establish one fast reaction force and eighteen brigades in the defence sector through a brassage process. Just fifteen integrated brigades had been established by the time of the 2006 elections. Due to inadequate planning and a lack of funding, the brassage process was defective. The military of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) was a fragmented, divided, ill-trained, and disorganised organization that was linked to serious human rights abuses. The integrated brigades also performed poorly. Conflicting ideas about future defence institutions between the Chief of Staff and the Minister of Defence hindered military reform following the 2006 elections. Additionally, inconsistent resource use has plagued the defence reform process. The EU project, which aimed to separate the chain of command from the system of payment in order to prevent military commanders from embezzling troops' salaries, was opposed by military commanders. In 2019, the new Defence Minister limited the military's role to protecting the state's territorial integrity. Since then, a new master plan for military reform has been created, with a focus on personnel rejuvenation and training, among other things. In general, political, economic, and logistical issues continue to make the DRC's defence reform agenda difficult.

Establishing a police force capable of guaranteeing the elections was one of the transitional government's main goals, with backing from the international community. For this reason, a unique outfit called the Rapid Intervention Force was established. Following the elections, the conceptualisation of the Congolese national police's institutions and functions became the main

focus of police reform. Legislation was prepared and recommendations were made by a consultation group. Since 2013, South Africa, Angola, France, Belgium, and other partner states have trained thousands of police officers. There are still a lot of issues, though, such as police officers' low pay and frequent accusations of violating human rights. In addition the police still have military status and contain many former soldiers.

The DRC government has mainly kept its intelligence agencies out of the SSR procedures. The intelligence agencies frequently compete with one another as a result of overlapping missions and tasks. The absence of supervision resulting from the president's exclusive power over the intelligence services presents additional governance issues. The latter are thought to be complicit in human rights abuses, particularly against those who oppose the current government.

Recent years have seen a surge in judicial and criminal justice reform, supported by funds from the EU and UN. The administration unveiled a plan in 2017 that aimed to address structural issues with the judiciary's budgetary and human resource management. In order to restructure the courts by creating new jurisdictions, the government had also started a series of draft papers. Numerous prisons across the nation had undergone rehabilitation. The Congolese judiciary continued to face numerous difficulties in spite of these efforts, including political meddling, low pay, employment instability, and corruption.

The government has not been held accountable by oversight institutions, particularly parliament and civil society, particularly when it comes to delicate matters like security force reform and the illegal behaviour of security service personnel. In the DRC, civil society has been actively involved in SSR, particularly in the areas of police and military reform. Even yet, it still has to deal with issues including a lack of government cooperation and knowledge, if not outright animosity and reported violence.

North Africa

The 2010 and 2011 Arab Spring events permanently altered the political landscape of Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, but they mostly spared the reigning regimes in Morocco, Algeria, and the oil kingdoms of Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. There appears to be no end in sight to the deadly revolutions in Syria and Yemen. Despite a mixed past, these developing dynamics present a special chance for democratic change across the Middle East and North Africa. How much can SSR be applied to the transitory states of North Africa now that we have a better knowledge of its advantages and disadvantages in the African context? The difficulties are enormous. According to DeGroot (2020), the Arab Spring can be partially seen as a response to both the excesses of individual dictators and the mistreatment and humiliations that citizens endured at the hands of their predatory security establishments. The transition states in the region have inherited repressive, corrupt, and oversized security institutions with a history of operating with impunity. Without a question, if Egyptians, Tunisians, and Libyans are to believe in the transition, their security forces must undergo significant change. They also need to be educated about the duties of security institutions in a democratic polity—goals at the core of SSR. In Egypt, the central issue is how to loosen the stranglehold of the security institutions over Egyptian society: a complex, long-term process requiring ". . . a great, great deal of stamina" (Ehrenreich, 2023).

Countering corruption, advancing transitional justice and police reform, strengthening civil society, and facilitating democratic civilian control of the security sector are a number of gradual, problem-solving entry points. However, for obvious reasons, implementing SSR in North Africa is a dangerous endeavour. The credibility of the Western-driven SSR has been destroyed by the

history of Western support for Arab dictatorships. Given its policy goals, which include counterterrorism, containing Iran, access to naval bases, stabilising Iraq, preserving relations with Israel, and energy security, the US military and intelligence services' role in the region was and continues to be particularly problematic (DeGroot, 2020; Fawcett, 2025). The issue of coordination arises if SSR establishes itself in the area. SSR interventions are frequently accompanied by competing, inconsistent, and even contradictory SSR programing, as demonstrated by the experience of Western-driven SSR in the DRC. The US and Europe take rather different approaches to SSR, and it is still necessary to assess how the developing Western public debt crisis would affect SSR funding. Lastly, geographical variances should be taken into consideration in SSR initiatives. The constant threat of a counter-revolution or an intensification of violent conflict is something that reformers need to be aware of. The region seems to be dividing into two groups: the counter-revolutionary states (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Syria) and the revolutionary (Egypt, Libya, Bahrain) and reforming (Tunisia, Morocco) states.

All things considered, SSR will surely play a significant role in the long-term change of North African politics and security, but short-term, formulaic Western conceptions of SSR are unlikely to result in the democratic management of its security sectors. If anything, its current function in the SSR is a poisoned chalice that should be avoided completely due to the Western and US past. Instead, the emphasis should be on Africa's inherent ability to contribute to the process. To this purpose, the AU's recently established SSR policy framework and the different networks of SSR knowledge can be used to bridge the gap, including integrating the Arab League into the SSR.

A Continental Approach to SSR?

The African Union (AU) Assembly's February 2008 decision, which "encourages the Commission to develop a comprehensive AU policy framework on SSR, within the context of the policy framework on post-conflict reconstruction and development . . . of 2006," established the mandate for the creation of a continental SSR policy framework (Nugentt, 2022). After three years and a complex sequence of consultations, a final draft policy was prepared for the AU Executive Council's review and approval in 2012.

The thirteen sections of the August 2011 draft AU policy framework on security sector reform cover the following major topics: (a) rationale, scope, and goals; (b) principles; (c) prohibitions; (d) essential components of SSR programming; (e) gender mainstreaming; (f) vulnerable groups and the rehabilitation of ex-combatants, veterans, refugees, and internally displaced persons; (g) continental implementation strategies; (h) the role of African civil society in SSR; (i) relationships with cooperating partners; and (j) AU Commission implementation mechanisms and development of guiding tools.

Many aspects of the draft AU policy framework are innovative, including a dedicated focus on gender and vulnerable groups. Three additional aspects of the draft policy are striking.

First, it has chosen inclusive and thorough definitions. According to Nugentt (2022), pp. 25–26, a security sector is defined as "individuals, groups, and institutions responsible for the provision, management, and oversight of security for the people and the state." This includes "primary security institutions, intelligence, public oversight and management bodies, justice and rule of law institutions, civil emergency units, and non-state security bodies." It defines security sector reform (SSR) as

the process by which countries formulate or re-orient the policies, structures, and capacities of institutions and groups engaged in the security sector, in order to make them more effective,

efficient, and responsive to democratic control, and to the security and justice needs of the people (Nugentt, 2022, p. 26).

SSR is equated with security and justice reform, security sector governance, security sector transformation, security sector development, and security sector review. Given that these different notions have distinct meanings and foci, this seems strange.

Second, it demands implementation tactics that are active, if not activist (it calls for a periodical assessment of the security sector at least once every ten years). In summary, the four goals of the draft policy are to: (1) give members and RECs a framework for conducting SSR processes; (2) offer a platform for SSR training and capacity-building; (3) direct SSR relationships between external actors and the AU, RECs, and member states; and (4) help Africans contribute to the UN's global SSR framework. The ten principles of the draft emphasise this direct approach by requiring SSR procedures to be a part of the developing continental African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) as well as a more general democratisation process. They also pay particular attention to national ownership (including subjecting external support to nationally defined visions of security and SSR), gender, the role of informal and customary security providers, and assistance coordination.

Thirdly, the document precisely outlines the boundaries of SSR. These include the use of children in the armed forces, the use of mercenaries, and the ban on both internal and foreign SSR actions that could have a detrimental effect on the sovereignty of member states, “including the use of SSR to effect regime change in a member state” (Nugentt, 2022, p. 28). Additionally, the draft policy "deplores" the usage of private military firms in the SSR and mandates that private security firms adhere to specific legal frameworks.

The heart of the draft policy is located in section D, which describes in some detail nine key (it also calls them fundamental and core) elements on which SSR programs must be based. Participating member states – regarded as the primary providers of peace and security – are expected to undertake security sector review and needs assessments every ten years, produce a national security strategy, ensure SSR programs are based on sound and adequate legal and security policy frameworks (could this be a contradiction or is it a question of proper sequencing of activities?), undertake comprehensive capacity-building programs, maintain equal partnerships with external actors and in fact conduct partnership analyses, commit to strengthening instruments for democratic oversight of the security sector, finance national SSR processes and fund the security sector on an annual budget basis – but may coordinate with other stakeholders to ensure sustainability of funding, develop and implement sector-wide and results-based mechanisms for the monitoring and evaluation of SSR processes, and finally, run an effective communications strategy to inform stakeholders (including the public) of developments in the SSR process.

Apart from the key role of member states, the AU and RECs have particular roles in implementing SSR. The draft policy expects the AU to perform a rather exhaustive list of functions in rolling out the continental SSR strategy and the RECs are expected to play a supportive role via coordination, financial support, and in general, support to the AU.

Lastly, the draft policy acknowledges that the design and implementation of SSR processes require carefully designed linkages. It highlights three stakeholders or players—African civil society, the UN, and cooperating partners (in general, the donor community)—that play a supporting role in the non-state sector and abroad.

How effective will this SSR policy framework be? Success is measured in a variety of ways. The AU political leadership and member states' combined adoption of the text will serve as a short-term success indicator. Another indicator of success in the medium term will be the

implementation of projects and programs that emerge from the framework, which will translate the policy intent. An additional indicator of success will be the degree to which African states and civil society would collaborate with outside partners like the UN or the donor community in carrying out certain portions of the strategy.

But ultimately, when governments adopt democratic measures to steer the security sector, and when members of the security sector are able to provide security to their people and states, confident of their governance structures, effectiveness and efficiency, and when in the process peace and human security are advanced, then one can speak of policy success.

Can African governments, authorities, members of the security sector, and society at large live up to these high standards? The policy framework places significant demands on the AU, RECs, African governments, and their leaders in terms of time, effort, and resources. Medhane Tadesse identifies the primary flaw in the AU's Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) policy framework: the state's capacity. He refers to it as the "elephant in the room" (Tadesse, 2022a, pp. 132-133). The argument is simple: how can weak or fragile states undertake complex security sector reform programs when states themselves are in need of reform, if not transformation? There are no easy answers, except to say that the African state (or legislatures and judiciaries) cannot be replaced or bypassed in terms of delivering human security. Where these are weak and being abused or marginalised by ruling elites, the objective will have to be to strengthen and recover their legitimacy.

Tadesse adopts a radical stance on the matter. He contends that in order for an SSR policy framework for Africa to be effective, it must address the fundamental issue of the divide between the state and society. He thinks that the disarticulation of the African state is at risk. Many states are unable to provide even the most basic security. By building powerful states that are capable of delivering, SSR could be helpful. According to him, SSR ought to be based on a thorough reevaluation of the state as well as the inherited (post-colonial) security structures and ideas, which have shown to be obviously problematic in African contexts. This style of thinking may become essential if SSR is to endure and expand throughout Africa without prejudging results. Such a rethink should not be confined to high-level bureaucrats, politicians or NGO experts and consultants. With peace and security at stake, nothing less than an open public discourse will do.

Conclusion

Africa has faced evolving security risks over time. New security risks are emerging as long-standing ones, like violent armed conflict, are on the decline. This paper makes the case that state weakness is Africa's biggest security threat. Even with its relative advancements over time, the African state is still vulnerable. New security issues with grave implications for human security continue to arise as a result of weak institutions, poor governance, and development. To address the issues, numerous state, regional, and global initiatives are being undertaken. Peacebuilding initiatives on the continent are nevertheless hampered by limitations resulting from a lack of political will, institutional ability, resource-financial, technical, logistical, and operational capacity limits. Therefore, there is a need for the continent to continue to develop democratic governance structures and strong institutions capable of responding in timely fashion to effectively address the growing nontraditional threats to security.

This paper discovers that SSR is a liberal notion that is frequently employed by Western donors in their efforts to improve the functioning of a recipient nation's security sector, particularly after a conflict. Although the idea has a lot of potential—namely, improving democratic control and monitoring of the security sector as well as its effective and efficient management—it has been

understood differently over time, leading to conceptual diffusion. More important, though, is the general mistrust of its underlying political motivations, particularly since it is now evident that SSR serves as a front for certain outside parties to influence recipients' security agendas in their favour rather than necessarily improving a suffering population's access to human security or development opportunities.

Supporters of the post-liberal state school of SSR (the non-state sector and local ownership approach) and the conventional school of SSR (the state-centric approach) are clearly at odds in Africa. While African actors active in SSR embrace the latter strategy, donors choose the former. Crucially, though, both strategies have a basic shortcoming: they are unable to adequately account for the characteristics of African states. The African state has become an instrument of accumulation for the governing elites due to its weakness, disarticulation, and abuse; as a result, it cannot be utilised as a foundation for significant SSR. This result is corroborated by our assessment of SSR experiences across Africa.

The paper demonstrates that SSR has a higher chance of success in specific circumstances. SSR is not supported by authoritarian control, which results in weak or failing nations and, in the worst situations, violent conflict and war. SSR is more acceptable in societies that have just emerged from conflict and are going through a phase of recuperation that will eventually lead to the establishment of democratic governance. Specifically, the stage of peace transition appears to be the best time for SSR. Establishing a government, carrying out reforms like socioeconomic revitalisation, and encouraging social harmony are the hallmarks of this stage. This affects the introduction of SSR during pivotal periods throughout Africa, particularly in regions that are undergoing people's revolutions. Before SSR is fully implemented, real and enduring transitions from authoritarian to democratic government must be made in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt in North Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Central Africa, and Somalia and Sudan in the larger Horn of Africa. It may be argued that these nations are at an earlier stage of their transitions, namely conflict cessation, rather than the peace building transition or consolidation phases (see Figure 1.1). Outsiders play a crucial role in these difficult times because they have the ability to decide the security agendas of weak, fragile, or broken nations, which can either greatly advance or seriously harm the prospects for comprehensive SSR. For instance, the US's involvement in North Africa is highly suspicious.

The African Union may take decisive action to promote a progressive and all-encompassing African-driven SSR policy framework, but as the discussion above pointed out, it may suffer from having high expectations of those who are supposed to carry out SSR, whether they be national actors, Regional Economic Communities, or the AU itself.

In conclusion, there are significant lessons to be learned from the SSR experience in South Africa, which is often seen as a model to emulate. In actuality, each SSR case must be comprehended within its unique context. The degree and pace at which an SSR agenda can be advanced will depend on local circumstances, customs, resources, and interactions with other parties. In South Africa's situation, it should be acknowledged that the efficiency of the post-apartheid security sector has been unequal, even if the nation can legitimately claim to have radically reformed its security sector. The inability of the South African government and state to provide human security is the root cause of the country's severe crime and corruption issues; the intelligence services have become entangled in the politics of the ruling party; the government and the armed forces were involved in a contentious arms procurement scandal; the criminal justice system is still in crisis; some members of the security sector, such as immigration and correctional services, are not fully

integrated; and policy frameworks need to be updated and harmonised. Overall, a security sector revamp is required in South Africa.

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