



POLICY BRIEF 1

Fifteen Diplomats on a Powder Keg: Africa and the United Nations Security Council

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1. Introduction

The University of Pretoria's (UP) Centre for the Advancement of Scholarship (CAS) and Future Africa in South Africa, partnered with the Sweden-based Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), to host a policy dialogue on **"Fifteen Diplomats on a Powder Keg: Africa and the United Nations (UN) Security Council."** The meeting took place on 24 October 2022, and involved senior diplomats, heads of UN agencies, civil society, media, scholars, and students. The dialogue had three key aims: first, to strengthen the effectiveness of the Elected Ten (E10) members on the Council in promoting positive peacekeeping outcomes in Africa; second, to craft ideas to ensure an effective division of labour between the UN, the European Union (EU), and Africa's regional bodies in strengthening Africa's security architecture; and third, to increase the meaningful participation of women and human rights priorities in peace processes across the continent, while highlighting the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the need to link security to development. This policy brief is based on key discussions and recommendations from the 24 October 2022 dialogue.

2. The UN Security Council in the Shadow of Ukraine

The meeting took place in the shadow of the Ukraine war – with 2 billion people globally living in conflict-affected areas – at a time when the 15-member UN Security Council is more divided than at any time in the last three post-Cold War decades. Efforts are once again afoot – for the first time in four decades – by Western actors to strengthen the role of the 193-strong UN General Assembly in the area of peace and security. But like the Council, the Assembly is also divided on many of these thorny issues. It was noted that the five veto-wielding permanent members (the P5) of the Council – the United States (US), China, Russia, France, and Britain – who are mandated to maintain international peace and security, ironically account for 76 per cent of arms sales that fuel global conflicts.

Though the conflicts in Libya and Syria have divided the Security Council since 2011, tensions have recently increased between a Sino-Russian bloc and the Western trio of the US, France, and Britain. The business of the Council has, however, continued on non-Ukraine cases, with 36 resolutions having been passed between January and October 2022. Four vetoes have nevertheless been cast over Ukraine (twice), North Korea, and Syria. The Ukraine conflict has raised the spectre of a new Cold War pitting *Pax Sinica* against *Pax Americana*. This triggered a lively debate over the efforts by African, Asian, and Latin American states to revive a new "non-alignment" in order to avoid becoming embroiled in what many see as great power "proxy wars". There were also strident calls to end the Western double standards over cases such as Palestine and Western Sahara, and to uphold the rules-based international order consistently not just in Ukraine, but also in places such as Iraq.

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AN ELDERLY WOMAN AFTER DAYS OF HIDING IN A SHELTER TO SURVIVE THE SHELLING IN IRPIN, UKRAINE IN MARCH 2022.

IMAGE CREDIT - Yan Boechat/Wikimedia Commons



Several participants advocated the strengthening of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, since many post-conflict countries relapse into war as a result of inadequate peacebuilding resources being provided to rebuild conflict-ravaged states. The increased focus by the Council on integrating actionable language in support of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda – particularly since 2016 – was praised, with E10 members Sweden, Germany, Kenya, Mexico, and Ireland recently backing these efforts. There were, however, urgent calls to address the exclusion of women from African mediation processes.

3. Reforming the Council

American president, Joe Biden's call at the UN General Assembly in September 2022, for the expansion of the UN Security Council in order to bring in permanent representation from Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere, generated much debate at the dialogue. France has also called for text-based negotiations on Council reform, while Paris, London, and the Nordic countries have backed greater African representation on the Council. Many speakers advocated the expansion of an unrepresentative Council that has not been reformed since it was expanded from 11 to 15 members in 1965. Some explicitly called for countries such as Nigeria, South Africa, Brazil, and India to be brought into the Council to make this anachronistic body more representative of the world of 2022, rather than that of 1945. There were also calls to reform the UN's working methods, and a suggestion of reserving one of three African rotating seats for regional powers such as Nigeria, South Africa, Algeria, and Ethiopia in order to ensure consistently strong African representation on the Council.

Though half of the Security Council's resolutions over the last two decades have related to Africa, only 6.5 per cent of these have had a sole African pen-holder drafting them.

THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING ON CLIMATE AND SECURITY AT THE UN SECRETARIAT IN NEW YORK ON 23 SEPTEMBER 2021.

IMAGE CREDIT - Ron Przysucha/Public Domain
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Though half of the Security Council's resolutions over the last two decades have related to Africa, only 6.5 per cent of these have had a sole African pen-holder drafting them. Perversely, France, Britain, and America write all the Security Council resolutions in 11 out of 13 African cases, as if continuing colonial spheres of influence. Currently, Russia drafts two resolutions (on Central Asia and the Golan Heights), while China drafts none. African and other regional powers were therefore urged to seize these pens from the hyperactive Western trio, and ensure that they become pen-holders on cases relating especially to the continent.

4. *Pax Africana* on the Council

The October 2022 policy meeting was also held as conflicts have proliferated in African theatres such as the eastern Congo, Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Somalia, Sudan, and Mozambique, with 70 per cent of the Security Council's deliberations typically focusing on the continent. About 22 million people on the Horn of Africa remain in danger of starvation, even as the rich world reneges on promises of providing \$100 billion a year by 2020 to supporting African and other developing country efforts to tackle climate change and its deleterious impacts. The main focus of the deliberations was Africa, to which 84 per cent of the UN's 72,481 peacekeepers are deployed. With 22 debt-distressed African countries needing relief, there were calls to divert more resources from security to development, and to prioritise conflict prevention in order to address the root causes of conflicts.

The Council has clearly not done enough to strengthen the capacity of African regional organisations, and to collaborate more effectively with them in the field. Often led by South Africa in 2019/2020, African states on the Council worked with China and Russia to push back against Western preferences in Abyei, Burundi, Darfur, South Sudan, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). South Africa's "Ubuntu diplomacy" is a "soft power" tool to promote its interests through attracting others to its values and principles. The country was able to build institutional memory through its two previous stints on the Council in 2007/2008 and 2011/2012, as well as through continued hosting of, and participation in, monthly E10 meetings, in a process initiated with Sweden in 2018. During all three of its Council terms, Tshwane (Pretoria) prioritised the strengthening of the UN's relationship with the African Union (AU) and other regional bodies in Africa.

The three African members (A3) of the Council - Ghana, Gabon, and Kenya in 2022 - now coordinate their efforts closely with the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa, with quarterly meetings facilitated by the AU Permanent Observer to the UN, Nigeria's Fatima Mohammed. The A3 collaborated effectively with the Caribbean island of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in 2020/2021. It has consistently but unsuccessfully called for the UN to fund 75 per cent of African-led peacekeeping operations through UN assessed contributions. There were also calls for a long delayed 25,000-strong permanent African Standby Force (ASF) to be urgently established, and for the AU's \$315 million Peace Fund to be massively increased. Tensions have historically been evident in the UN's peacekeeping collaboration with the AU in Darfur, CAR, and Mali, even as 16 meetings have been held between both security councils. The EU has deployed four small military missions into the Congo (twice), Chad, and Chad/CAR, which were sometimes seen to be pursuing parochial French interests in Africa, while 13 meetings have been held between the security bodies of the AU and the EU.

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PROFESSOR ADEKEYE ADEBAJO, SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOW AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA'S CENTRE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCHOLARSHIP.

IMAGE CREDIT - The Visual Studio



5. Pax Europa on the Council

Then EU Ambassador in New York, Portugal's João de Almeida, coordinated joint EU statements on the UN Security Council in 2019/2020, providing inputs to the EU's rotating members on discussions among key institutions in Brussels. Nordic countries coordinate their campaigns and tenures, and have fielded a candidate to the Council during every other Council mandate. Sweden served on the Council in 2017/2018, stressing the link between peacebuilding and development. Stockholm often voted closely with its EU partners, including on African issues such as South Sudan; as Belgium did over the DRC.

During its term in 2021/2022, fellow Nordic and non-EU member, Norway, prioritised the issue of climate change and security. In the course of its tenure on the Council in 2011, Germany abstained from voting for the Anglo-French-American military intervention in Libya, enabling it to play a bridging role on the Council. Berlin also shared the pen with Britain on Libyan sanctions in 2019/2020. During this latter stint, Germany voted 77 per cent of the time with the US and its fellow Western allies. Berlin and Paris also worked closely on the Council, sharing a joint presidency in March and April 2019.

6. Women, Peace, and Security

The October 2022 policy dialogue also reflected on the Security Council's thematic work focused on the human-centred themes of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, and the Protection of Civilians (POC). In the post-Cold War era, the Council has undergone a normative expansion from seeking to address mainly traditional state-centric security threats to taking special measures to address the vulnerability of unarmed civilians. Since the passing of Security Council resolution 1325 of October 2000, WPS has since developed into a broad framework based on 15 thematic resolutions that have called for protecting women's rights, halting conflict-related sexual violence, integrating gender into conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts, and increasing the participation of women in peace and political processes.

The WPS agenda has been embraced by elected members of the Security Council, with its founding resolution 1325 having been adopted under Namibia's presidency of the Council in October 2000. While the US and Britain hold the pen for this thematic area, E10 members have strengthened the Council's working methods on these issues in order to advance its implementation. Sweden, for example, used its membership of the Council in 2017/2018 to incorporate WPS language into Council statements and resolutions. Stockholm thus introduced more robust and context-relevant benchmarks for women's empowerment and inclusion into peace talks and gender-sensitive humanitarian action. This enhanced the consistent collection of sex-disaggregated data. These measures were often based on information provided by women's civil society organisations.

The WPS agenda has been embraced by elected members of the Security Council.

(FROM L-R): MS ALETA MILLER, UN WOMEN REPRESENTATIVE IN SOUTH AFRICA; MS VÉRONIQUE HALLER, DEPUTY AMBASSADOR OF SWITZERLAND TO SOUTH AFRICA; AND DR ANGELA MUVUMBA SELLSTRÖM, SENIOR RESEARCHER, NORDIC AFRICA INSTITUTE, UPPSALA.

IMAGE CREDIT - The Visual Studio



Women have increasingly served as negotiators or members of delegations in UN peace processes.

DR THERÉSE SJÖMANDER MAGNUSSON, DIRECTOR, NORDIC AFRICA INSTITUTE, UPPSALA; AND AMBASSADOR MAUD DLOMO, DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL, SOUTH AFRICA'S DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION (DIRCO).

IMAGE CREDIT - The Visual Studio



Since 2018, there has been an 18 per cent increase in WPS language in Council resolutions. E10 members have further developed other mechanisms beyond formal resolutions. Niger - a member of the Council in 2020/2021 – worked with the AU and the EU to launch the UN Group of Friends of Women of the Sahel in June 2021. In the same year, Ireland, Kenya, and Mexico established the Presidency Trio for WPS during their consecutive tenures. The Trio further pursued the shared goal of achieving gender balance among briefers to the Council. Incoming elected states such as Switzerland (2023/2024) plan to build on these priorities.

There is an urgent need to identify gaps, accelerate implementation, and improve how the Council addresses WPS issues. Following recommendations from the 2015 Global Study on WPS, E10 member, Spain, invited the first civil society brifer, Liberia's Victoria Wollie of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), to address the Council. Sweden's July 2018 presidency represented the first time that gender parity was achieved in Council briefers. Since then, civil society briefing on WPS issues has become a regular practice. However, women briefers from Africa have often expressed their frustration at the lack of follow-up after Council briefings. They have also complained that their testimonies on the Council frequently constitute dramatic performances of female suffering that do not lead to concrete outcomes capable of transforming the lives of women in conflict zones. Moreover, some briefers have faced public backlash after addressing the Council, sometimes being targeted for political violence and harassment.

More positively, women have increasingly served as negotiators or members of delegations in UN peace processes. The AU established the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise-Africa), while European countries have set up similar networks for the Nordic and Mediterranean regions. South Africa has also provided training to 700 potential women mediators. These efforts have, however, had mixed results. While women are keen to be part of peace processes, they are often not invited to participate in formal regional mediation and facilitation efforts.

Policy Recommendations

The following ten policy recommendations emerged from the October 2022 meeting:

1. The UN Security Council must be urgently expanded to bring in countries from the global South such as Nigeria, South Africa, Brazil, and India in order to make the organisation's most powerful organ more democratic and representative of the contemporary world.
2. A non-aligned bloc within the Council can potentially play a role in balancing the overwhelming dominance of the veto-wielding P5, while building coalitions with other E10 members who should use the knowledge and institutional memory that resides within the UN secretariat more strategically to inform Council decisions.

3. The Security Council should fund African-led peacekeeping missions through UN assessed contributions; the 25,000-strong permanent African Standby Force must be urgently established, and the AU's \$315 million Peace Fund massively increased; one of the three African rotating seats should also be reserved for regional powers such as Nigeria, South Africa, Algeria, and Ethiopia, in order to ensure consistently strong African representation on the Council.
4. The working methods of the Security Council must continue to be revised to ensure greater transparency and participation, particularly in the pen-holding system of drafting Council resolutions.
5. It is important that the Council establish early warning systems based on best practices over the last three post-Cold War decades, and institutionalise them effectively into the mechanisms of the UN and African regional bodies in order to ensure early action and avoid costly military interventions after conflicts have already erupted.
6. Regarding the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, the Council must address gender hierarchies, values, and attitudes. Thus, UN entities such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Peacebuilding Commission, and the Human Rights Council should contribute more effectively to a protective, gender-sensitive environment based on their areas of specialization.
7. On the protection front, measures by the UN should become more holistic. Mandates to prevent armed actors from committing sexual violence must go beyond advisory services and securitized tactical patrols, and prioritise initiatives that work with men and boys; provide socialisation training to armed actors; and support survivors of rape and abuse with psycho-social therapy and livelihood development.
8. The UN's reports relating to WPS tend to rely disproportionately on Western academic and policy sources; African research institutions who are closer to conflict situations on the continent, must therefore provide more research and information to enrich these reports.
9. The link between security and development should continue to be made through implementing the UN's SDGs and strengthening the UN Peacebuilding Commission; UN Secretary-General, António Guterres's suggestion of a stimulus plan of 2 per cent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$500 billion, should be made available in order to catalyse the world economy, with infrastructure and electrification particularly prioritised.
10. Finally, debt relief must be urgently provided, particularly to the 22 debt-distressed countries in Africa, by suspending onerous debt payments in order to ensure that these countries can recover from the triple plagues of conflicts, climate change, and Covid/19. Multilateral funds should also be leveraged to ensure the long-term resilience of societies in distress.

The Security Council should fund African-led peacekeeping missions through UN assessed contributions.

UGANDAN TROOPS SERVING UNDER THE AFRICAN UNION MISSION IN SOMALIA (AMISOM) IN SEPTEMBER 2021.

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