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Introduction

This book deals with the increasing extent and quality of inter-African cooperation in the area of peace and security. In particular, it deals with the efforts of the African Union (AU), an inter-governmental organization to which all but one of Africa’s 54 states belong, to establish what it calls the African Peace and Security Architecture. Among other components, this institutional architecture is eventually supposed to comprise a military standby force of approximately 15,000 to 20,000 troops which can be used to stop genocides and other crimes against humanity and an elaborate early warning mechanism which is to process information from around the continent and thus allow for a timely assessment of and responses to security threats. While news coverage of the ongoing atrocities in the Congo, Sudan and Somalia and the electoral scandals in Kenya and Zimbabwe continues to cast a penumbra of doubt over the ability of the continent to realize this ambitious project, the member states of the AU have already achieved some remarkable successes on the way. For example, they have created a multi-layered and poly-centric governance structure to manage their security relations that evolves around a Peace and Security Council akin to the Security Council of the United Nations. They have also agreed on a Common African Defense and Security Policy, incorporated a plethora of existing regional security and conflict management mechanisms into one coherent (continental) approach and conducted a number of independent peace operations in places such as Burundi, Darfur, the Comoros and Somalia.

All of this makes a notable change from the past. For reasons ranging from the dynamics of the Cold War, the continent’s unfinished liberation and the limitations of its own founding charter, the AU’s institutional predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) had never been able to encourage similar levels of inter-state cooperation. On the contrary, the OAU’s almost 40-year existence was marked by its inability to provide an institutional basis for inter-African security cooperation. As the Cold War came to an end, this inability led Africa’s states to turn to regional organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to fill the institutional void and
eventually caused them to replace the OAU with a more promising African Union modeled after the European archetype. Given the fate of its predecessor, the swiftness with which the AU has revitalized the quest for what Ali Mazrui once called a “Pax Africana that is protected and maintained by Africa herself” calls for a reappraisal of inter-African security cooperation.1

With this in mind, the purpose of this book is twofold. Its empirical objective is to offer a detailed description of the historical evolution and contemporary pattern of inter-state security cooperation on the continent. In particular, it seeks to shed light on (1) the multitude of initiatives that preceded the creation of the AU’s security architecture, (2) the path to and details of that creation, (3) the structure, role and current state of the AU’s new institutions and mechanisms, and (4) the remaining challenges to effective inter-African security cooperation. In the process, it explores a number of elementary questions. For example, to what extent does contemporary security cooperation on the African continent differ from previous initiatives, and what accounts for these differences? What can continent-wide projects like the African Standby Force or the Continental Early Warning System tell us about the state and direction of contemporary security cooperation in Africa? Is there a qualitative difference between the security cooperation observed at the regional level and that taking place at the continental level? What is the role of international support in all of this?

At the same time, the book also has two theoretical objectives, namely, (1) to offer a constructivist interpretation of the dynamics of security cooperation in contemporary Africa and (2) to mine the continent’s emerging security architecture for new insights on international cooperation in general. Relying on African realities such as collective identities and shared values to explain the increasing extent and quality of security cooperation on the continent, it seeks to draw attention to the need to complement rationalist-systemic theories of inter-state cooperation with a detailed understanding of social processes. To this purpose, it focuses on the role of ideational factors such as shared historical experiences and common aspirations, but also of ideologies like Pan-Africanism, concepts like the African Renaissance and processes like norm diffusion in the induction and evolution of inter-state cooperation on the continent.

Underlying these objectives is the aspiration to answer two fundamental research questions, namely, why have Africa’s states chosen to intensify their cooperation in the field of peace and security over the last decade, and what does this cooperation look like today. However straightforward these questions may seem, both their
theoretical complexity and the ongoing evolution of inter-state security cooperation in Africa prevent equally straightforward answers. In this respect, the findings discussed in chapters ten, eleven and twelve should be taken not so much as definitive pronouncements, but rather as indicators and stimuli for future research agendas. At the very least, they should generate further debate and discussion on inter-African security cooperation, and thus help to address the notable imbalance in the academic literature on cooperation that originally motivated this study.

Argument

The book is built on two core arguments, namely, (1) that the current developments on the African continent enable a detailed understanding of the motivations for, and evolutionary patterns of, complex inter-state security cooperation, and (2) that a constructivist approach offers a useful theoretical lens through which to examine these motivations and evolutionary patterns as well as their institutional manifestations. Given the ongoing marginalization of Africa in International Relations (IR) theory as well as the continuing dominance of rationalist-systemic theories of international cooperation, both arguments call for some initial justification.

It is certainly true that Africa is no longer as absent from theorizing about world politics as Kevin Dunn once lamented. Instead, there has been a notable increase in the literature on the role of Africa in world politics and related issue areas such as security and development. However, given that more than one out of seven people and one out of four nations in the world are African, the amount of IR scholarship that analyzes the continent for theory-building purposes is still insignificant. This omission is a long-standing problem. Bernard Magubane, for example, reminds us that much of the historical literature that has influenced Western thought displays an uncritical ignorance of Africa. For example, Hegel in the Introduction to the Philosophy of History

states:

At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world, it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movement in it – that is in its northern part – belongs to the Asiatic or European world. What we properly understand by Africa is the unhistorical, underdeveloped spirit still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here as on the childhood of the world’s history.
Over the centuries, such stereotypical and largely Eurocentric presentation of Africa has glossed over the essence and theoretical relevance of the continent’s political realities. As a direct result, a notable inattention to African politics has become deeply ingrained in the dominant approaches within IR theory. Both realism and neo-liberal institutionalism, for example, fail to accord the continent a place in their systemic analyses – despite their positivist epistemological pretension to provide general theories of international relations. In line with the realist catchphrase recorded by Thucydides in his Melian Dialogue that “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must”, for these theories Africa appears to exist only to the extent that it is acted upon.

While realism and liberalism are under attack from many quarters and on many grounds, this apparent imbalance between the pretension of universality and the exclusion of Africa remains virtually unexamined. The book argues that Africa’s recent move from ad hoc security initiatives to permanently institutionalized cooperation offers a unique chance to address this unfortunate gap in theorizing inter-state relations. Coupled with the increasing willingness of the continent’s states to conduct all-African peace operations, it not only provides a rich and heavily under-explored area for theoretical investigation, but also underlines Africa’s claim for a place in contemporary theory-building and testing.

I also contend that, contrary to the deterministic preconceptions of most other IR theories, the open and process-orientated approach of constructivism can account for the intensification of inter-African security cooperation and, even more importantly, offers an attractive theoretical framework for its analysis. Developed in part to overcome the inability of rationalist approaches to explain collective action, including the resolution of security dilemmas, constructivism goes much further than the dominant theories of security cooperation in portraying international relations as social constructs susceptible to limitless reformulation over time rather than as a static concept fixed to definable and unchanging conditions. While the realist – neo-liberal institutionalist debate has been primarily concerned with studying the barriers to cooperation, constructivists such as Alexander Wendt, Emmanuel Adler and Michael Barnett concentrate on how, under certain conditions, transnational forces and state interactions can generate the trust, reciprocity, shared knowledge and common identities necessary to transform global politics and overcome Hobbesian anarchy. Constructivism thereby draws on the explanatory power of inter-subjective factors such as ideas, beliefs and norms and social processes such as identity and interest formation rather than deep structure to
explain international relations. It is exactly because it “sees IR differently” that constructivism is so well suited to studying security cooperation in theoretically-marginalized regions like Africa.  

Naturally, this should not be taken to mean that the material forces of rationalist theories have lost their importance to the study of international cooperation, nor that we are witnessing the decline of the Westphalian nation state in Africa. Nonetheless, the African experience shows that the attention to the concern for power and sovereignty that undoubtedly continues to permeate international relations must be complemented by an understanding of the occasions in which these concerns are balanced against competing objectives or even muted altogether. Without such an understanding it is simply impossible to comprehend the recent proliferation of cooperative ventures on the African continent, particularly in the field of peace and security. Constructivism should thus be seen as a complementary theory which does not attempt to refute rationalist explanations of international cooperation as much as it seeks to expand them. Its great conceptual advantage over other theories is that its ideas can sit comfortably with the prevalence of “realist” behavior in some parts of the continent, while at the same time allowing for the role of inter-subjective factors such as the integrative and unifying force of Pan-Africanism, or the desire for continental emancipation.

**Methodology**

The dual purpose of this book necessitates a clearly defined methodology. Analogous to the works of Waltz, Keohane and also Wendt, I adopt a state-centric approach to international relations in my discussion of cooperation. The rationales for choosing such an approach have already been outlined by these authors in great detail and with great skill, so here it suffices to restate two important reassurances. First, the choice of the state as analytical unit does in no way entail a conceptual disregard for the pivotal role of non-state actors in the promotion of international cooperation. Several studies have drawn attention to the important links between states and non-state actors in this respect, and though fully investigating them would exceed the scope of this book, they need to be kept in mind, and are referred to at junctures where they have an important bearing on the policies of states. Second, despite its systemic perspective, this study does recognize the crucial role of domestic politics. This role is particularly important in Africa, where, as Jeffrey Herbst has pointed out, leaders have to be highly attentive to domestic concerns when making decisions
about international engagements in order to protect their national power bases. The occasional consideration of such unit-level factors, however, should not distract from the main level of analysis of the book, namely, the systemic interaction between states.

While I thus choose the same level of analysis employed by Waltz and Wendt, I go one step further, subdividing this level into two interdependent but separate layers of systemic investigation, namely, a regional layer of inter-state cooperation and a continental layer of inter-state cooperation. Africa’s emerging peace and security architecture is unique in the extent to which the continental level relies on regional organizations as pillars and implementation organs of its policies. A separate analysis of the two layers not only takes account of this important characteristic of contemporary security cooperation in Africa, but may also yield important insights into the possibility of different motivations for, and evolutions of, cooperation at the two layers. One criticism of previous attempts at theorizing inter-state security cooperation, including that of Wendt, virtually omnipresent throughout this book, is that their unconditional reliance on a monolithic level of systemic analysis glosses over conceptually rich patterns of inter-state relations. The African experience shows that it is important to differentiate between regional and continental cooperation, not least because of the different numbers of actors involved and the different rationales at play, and that doing so makes a difference to thinking about international cooperation.

While the definition of the continental layer is relatively straightforward, namely, all 53 member states of the AU, writers have offered several definitions of “the regional level”. These differ widely, both in their depth and significance. This book adopts a functional perspective on regionalism, defining its organizational aspect as a notion encompassing entities, which may, but do not necessarily, belong to a geographically determinable area, having either common or disparate attributes and values, but which seek the accomplishment of common goals. The distinctive force of this proposed definition is its emphasis on abstract values over mere physical proximity, and the possibility that states claiming to belong to a region may have divergent values. This definition reflects the reality in Africa where members of a single regional organization vaunt extremely diverse political systems varying from absolute monarchy and democracy to militarocracy. It is on the basis of political and economic aspirations amongst states moving towards closer cooperation rather than mere geographical proximity or communality of values that an effective system of regional collective security emerged after the Cold War.
Apart from its unusual geographic focus and sub-divided level of analysis, this work must be distinguished from previous discussions of inter-state security cooperation also by the substance of its engagement with sociological concepts and the extent to which it relies on historical retrospectives (nearly a quarter of its volume is dedicated to the evolution of security cooperation). Both features spring directly from the choice of the African continent as empirical test-case, for even a cursory glance at its institutional landscape reveals the crucial role of shared historical experiences and collective identities in the evolution of inter-state security relations. Without a detailed understanding of these historical experiences or occasional recourse to conceptual tools like symbolic interactionism and structuration theory in order to gauge their effects, an analysis of Africa’s emerging patterns of security cooperation is bound to miss important parts of the puzzle.16

The choice of case studies also requires some explanation. In order to assess the extent and quality of contemporary inter-state security cooperation, I look at two central pillars of Africa’s emerging peace and security architecture in particularly great detail, namely, the African Standby Force (ASF) and the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS). Both are highly prestigious projects which are supported by Africa’s states and the international community alike. While this significantly reduces their chances of failure, this is not why they were chosen here as examples of inter-African security cooperation. Rather they were selected for three very practical reasons. First, they relate to the most sensitive areas of security cooperation, namely, information sharing and military integration, and thus allow for what Stephan van Evera has called a “strong test” of the seriousness of cooperation.17 Second, their two very different raisons d’être, namely, the anticipation and prevention of conflict (for the CEWS) and the management of conflict (for the ASF) cover the full spectrum of contemporary inter-African security cooperation. Third, their heavily regionalized but centrally coordinated character makes for an interesting test of the divisibility of the systemic into separate levels of analysis, and thus for the methodological approach adopted in this book.

Given the substantial debates in the field, it is also necessary to define the two central concepts of the book, namely, cooperation and security, in order to avoid confusion and equivocation. Beginning with cooperation, Robert Keohane’s definition of the term as “mutual adjustment of policies by two or more states” comes closer than others to the meaning that most analysts seem to have in mind when they use it, and thus will be the one used here.18 This definition successfully distinguishes accords reached as a result of cooperation from those
reached on the basis of coercion, when the adjustment of policies is not mutual, and from the “coincidence of preferences” or harmony of interests, where all states follow their own national interests and the result is accord without conflict.

The exact meaning of security has long been hotly debated and there is no consensus in sight. On the contrary, over the years, this seemingly straightforward term has come to encompass everything from survival and the absence of a military threat to the freedom from fear and want, gradually turning into what Walter Gallie once called an “essentially contested concept”. Ken Booth, for example, has equated the concept with the “emancipation from the social, physical, economic, political and other constraints that stop people from carrying out what they would freely choose to do”, while Paul Williams paraphrases Alexander Wendt to argue that “security is what people make it”. The usage of the term security is thus inevitably fraught with conceptual difficulties. This is particularly true in the African context, for no other part of the world has had so little control over its own security agenda. Reflecting the extent of their involvement in the continent’s affairs, external actors such as former colonial powers, but also the United Nations and the European Union, have essentially shaped the discussion about the meaning of “African security” in their own image. As a result, a notable dichotomy has developed between African and non-African conceptions of “African security”. While for many African leaders regime survival undoubtedly continues to play the central role, non-African decision-makers generally focus on the increasingly popular and easier-to-sell notions of “new threats” and “human security” which they have superimposed on the African debate. In order to account for both conceptions of security, I follow the emerging Critical Security Studies literature in defining the term in the broadest sense possible as “the alleviation of threats to cherished values”.

Organization of the Book

The book is organized into twelve chapters. Following this introduction, the second chapter lays the theoretical groundwork for the ensuing discussion by drawing attention to the limits of rational-systemic theories of international relations and introducing social constructivism as a more appropriate framework for theorizing inter-state security cooperation in Africa. In particular, it highlights the importance of constructivist concepts like collective identities, norm diffusion, social learning and community-building for understanding the increasing extent and quality of inter-African cooperation.
In order to provide vital context, the next three chapters analyze the attempts at establishing some sort of continental security cooperation which preceded the creation of the AU and which had a profound impact on the way in which its security architecture has evolved. Emphasizing the rationales offered for attempting to centralize the responsibility for peace and security as well as the many obstacles to such centralization, chapters three, four and five track the quest for continental security cooperation through the past century. Chapter three thereby covers the feeble attempts of Africa’s freedom fighters to join forces, the repeated failure to establish an African High Command in the early years of decolonization, the inability of the OAU’s Defense Commission to agree on a common defense structure and the OAU’s ineffective peacekeeping operation in Chad. Chapter four details the subsequent devolution of security cooperation to the regional level as well as the supporting efforts of Western actors. On the basis of this retrospective journey, chapter five discusses the reasons for the revival of continental security cooperation at the turn of the 21st century and elaborates on the structural, conceptual and philosophical differences from the continent’s previous cooperative ventures.

Chapter six covers the remarkable surge in AU-led peace operations that accompanied the development of institutionalized security structures on the continent. It elaborates on the nature, structure and significance of the AU Mission in Burundi (AMIB), the AU missions in Sudan (AMIS I, II and IIE), the AU operations on the Comoros (AMISEC, MAES and Operation Democracy) and the African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

Chapter seven shifts the focus back to the institutional level and details the AU’s emerging peace and security architecture and its organizational components including the Peace and Security Council, the Panel of the Wise, the Military Staff Committee and the Special (Peace) Fund. It also provides an analysis of the AU’s Peace & Security Directorate as well as its various divisions and discusses the consensus-building role of the Common African Defense and Security Policy.

In order to assess the quality and extent of contemporary inter-state security cooperation in Africa, the next two chapters examine the two remaining pillars of the AU’s security architecture, namely the African Standby Force and the Continental Early Warning System. While both chapters go into great detail to demonstrate the complexity of these undertakings, they do not seek to provide an exhaustive description of the ASF and CEWS. Rather they focus on those aspects that help to highlight the state of contemporary inter-African security cooperation.
Chapter eight discusses the attempt of Africa’s states to establish a continental quick reaction force in order to improve their ability to respond to violent conflict and humanitarian catastrophes. It first elaborates on the concept, structure and operationalization of the ASF before it turns to the AU’s five regional partner organizations and their efforts to establish component standby brigades. As they are the most advanced regional brigades, the chapter focuses on the East African Standby Brigade, the ECOWAS Standby Force and the brigade of the Southern African Development Community.

Chapter nine begins by presenting the concept of the Continental Early Warning System and its current state of implementation. As in the previous chapter, this general introduction is followed by a review of the progress made by the continent’s regional and sub-regional organizations in developing their respective component early warning systems. Given their advanced stage of development and model character, the chapter pays special attention to the mechanisms set up by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the Economic Community of West African States.

Chapters ten and eleven summarize the findings of the book. Chapter ten distils the empirical observations into a number of key characteristics of contemporary inter-state security cooperation in Africa. These characteristics include the Africanization of security, the diffusion of liberal norms, the institutionalization of cooperation, the emergence of (security) communities, the consolidation of institutional partnerships and the dependence on international support.

Chapter eleven elaborates on some of the main challenges to effective inter-African security cooperation. Emphasizing those challenges that have not yet received as much attention as the obvious scarcity of financial and military resources, it covers the problems arising from asymmetrical regionalization, the proliferation of intergovernmental organizations, overlapping institutional memberships, the nature and quality of international support measures, the ulterior motives of some African states and the lack of institutional capacity at all levels of cooperation.

The final chapter discusses the implications of these observations for theorizing security cooperation, both in Africa and beyond. It draws attention to the importance of constructivist concepts like collective identities, norm diffusion, social learning and community-building in the evolution of inter-African cooperation, the crucial role played by institutions in fostering this cooperation and the need to be open to different logics of regionalization. I conclude by arguing that none of this book’s findings signify that the material forces of rational choice
theory have lost their importance to the study of international cooperation. Instead, the African experience merely shows that the attention to the concern for power and sovereignty that permeates international relations must be complemented by an understanding of the occasions where these concerns are balanced against competing objectives or even muted altogether.

Notes

4 For notable exceptions see the works of Paul Williams, Jürgen Haacke and Mohammed Ayoob.
9 See, for example, Emanuel Adler, "Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* 3, no. 3 (1997), Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Alexander


14 Joseph Nye, for example, defined an international region on the basis of geographical proximity as "a limited number of states linked together by a geographic relationship and by a degree of mutual interdependence". See Joseph Nye, ed., *International Regionalism* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co, 1968), xii. Scholars like Paul Taylor extend such a geographical approach to include the effective distance covered by organizations, that is, the geographical space influenced by particular decisions. See P Taylor, *International Organization in the Modern World* (London: Pinter, 1993). Neo-functionalists like Ernst Haas argue that the deterministic factor in conceptualizing a region is deducible only by reference to the dynamics of integration. See Ernst Haas, *The Uniting of Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968). Teleologists like Bruce Russett measure the existence of a region by gauging the consequences of the practice of it. Bruce Russett, "International Regions and the International System," in *Regional Politics and World Order*, ed. Richard Falk and Saul Mendlovitz (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1973).


20 An "essentially contested concept" is one for which, by definition, there can be no consensus as to its meaning. See W.B. Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56 (1956): 167-198.


