The African Union and Security Challenges in the Sahel: Prospects for Multilateral Diplomacy

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Abstract

The paper sheds light on the widespread security challenges in the Sahel region of Africa. Such threats and insecurity have manifested in the form of terrorism, insurgency, environmental challenges, climate change, etc. These are asymmetric in nature, with the tendency for spilling into other regions of Africa. Responding to these insecurity challenges require multilateral agreements and concerted efforts at regional and continental levels. The paper affirms that such arrangements have implications for multilateral diplomacy as there is the need to manage the efforts of international partners and power blocs in the region. If such diplomacies are conducted appropriately, it could signal an era of positive security change in the Sahel region. It could also usher in a regime of development and economic prosperity. On the other hand, if efforts by the AU are not properly managed, it could portend a Sahel region dotted with unchecked interests by superpower brokers, a 'cosmetic' cessation of security challenges and a region riddled with poor economic development indices and other drivers of insecurity.

Keywords: AU, Sahel, multilateral diplomacy, security

Introduction

The Sahel region is a vast semi-arid region of Africa separating the Sahara Desert to the north and tropical savannas to the south. It lies between 12°N and 20°N and it is composed of more than 2.5 million km^2 of arid and semiarid grasslands (Kardjadi, 2019, p.1). The Sahel stretches almost 5500 km across the south-central latitudes of North Africa between the Atlantic

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Ocean and the Red Sea in a strip 450km wide and covers all or part of 12 countries from the Atlantic coast to the Rea Sea (OECD, 2014). These countries include Mauritania, Senegal, the Gambia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti. The Sahel is as much a land of opportunities as it is of challenges. Although it has abundant human and natural resources, offering tremendous potential for rapid growth, there are deep-rooted challenges that have affect the prosperity and peace of the Sahel. The Sahel region is confronted with severe environmental, political, social, economic and security challenges that are exacerbating the threat posed by terrorism and violent extremism (Apau and Ziblim, 2019). Countries in the region—particularly Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria—have continued to witness increases in terrorist attacks and other security challenges. In response to this, the African Union, in collaboration with other regional and international organizations has put in place security structures to curtail the above challenges and insecurities in the Sahel region.

Thus, the creation of the African Union (AU) in 2002 has significantly changed the outlook on peace and security in the Sahel region. Ever since AU was established, the organisation has been charged with the responsibility of preventing, managing, and resolving violent conflicts ranging from political violence, climate and environmental challenges, terrorism, insurgency (Badejo, 2008, p.4), and so on. In the Sahel region, AU's interventions in African states especially in the Mali, Sudan and Nigerian crisis have been visible and effective to a reasonable extent. The establishment of the AU Peace and Security Council, PSC, in 2003 is deemed the single most important development in relation to peace and security on the continent. Since 2004, the PSC has acted as the fulcrum for the continent's conflict management activities (Aning, 2008). The AU and the development of an African Standby Force, whose mandate include a wide range of military tasks, from observation to interventions has helped immensely in tackling security challenges in the Sahel region. Again, to tackle insecurity in the Sahel region, the AU has collaborated with various regional and international bodies. This study, therefore, is an attempt to

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assess the security challenges in the Sahel region of Africa and its far-reaching implications on multilateral relations.

Security Challenges in the Sahel

The Sahel may be assessed through the VUCA acronym of being Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Asymmetric. The region is a highly vulnerable one, facing some of the major problems in the world. Armed conflict, fast-growing populations, extreme poverty, food insecurity, climate change, and epidemics are holding sway in the Sahel region, threatening the lives of populations already living on the edge of disaster. The impact of climate change has been severely felt in the region and over the past decades, three droughts have hit the region pushing Sahelians to the brink of humanitarian disaster (Mortimore, 2010). Violent extremism—often intertwined with intercommunal tensions and criminality—has continued to gain traction across the entire region. Rising instability and the deteriorating security situation in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have generated concerns among neighbouring West African states about the effects of regional spill over. The past decade turned the spotlight to the Sahel as a region of concerned due to pervasive instability of the countries and rapidly growing violence and extremist and terrorist tendencies. The Sahel now hosts a significant number of the world's deadliest terrorist groups—Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM), Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Ansaroul Islam, etc—resulting in numerous, protracted atrocities committed against civilians, security forces, military establishments, government officials and critical infrastructure (Lachher, 2012, p. 16). A significant number of other violent groups, not necessarily linked to Al-Qaeda or Islamic State (IS), have also emerged. The deteriorating security situation has triggered a spill over effect as terrorist and violent extremist groups continue to expand southwards towards coastal countries of West Africa. For the purposes of this study, we shall consider two sects that have created widespread insecurity in the Sahel region:

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The Tuareg Rebellion

One of the manifestations of conflict in the Sahel was the third *Tuareg* rebellion in 2012 in the northern part of Mali which completely changed the dynamics of terrorism and violent extremism in the region, resulting in the overthrow of the democratically elected government of Amadou Toumani Toure (Johnmary, 2013, p.103). Soon after, the security situation in Mali took a sharp nosedive. Within ten days into the military takeover, rebels and terrorists took control of the regional capitals of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu. The return to civilian rule in 2013 did little to improve the deteriorating security situation in the country. Religion-inspired violent extremist groups capitalised on the volatile security situation brought about by both the Tuareg rebellion and the then Malian government's off-balance state and ran riot in the north. The optimism that came with the signing of the Algiers Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in 2015 between the Malian government and the Coordination of Azawad Movements, an alliance of rebel groups in northern Mali, diminished as terrorist groups that were not party to the agreement expanded their activities (ACSRT, 2022, p.13). This resulted in the spread of terrorist groups and activities to central Mali by the end of 2015 and their impetus increased with the establishment of an alliance with the newly formed Macina Liberation Front (MLF) led by Amadou Koufa. The rapid spread quickly spilled over into Burkina Faso and Niger. In Burkina Faso, Ansarul Islam, then led by the late Mallam Ibrahim Dicko, had also commenced attacks in the north of the country. By 2017, the Sahel region became the epicentre of terrorist activities of the continent, with Mali bearing the brunt of most of the attacks.

Boko Haram in the Chad basin and other Al-Qaeda allied groups

Simultaneously, in the Lake Chad Basin, Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province—the former's splinter group—continued to maintain a climate of terror by multiplying deadly attacks against civilians, defence/security forces and various vulnerable targets augmented by massive kidnappings of girls and students (Olaniyan and Asuelime, 2014).

Following the expansion of AU and international military deployments in the region, the Al-Qaida-affiliated groups comprising AQIM, Al Mourabitoun, the MLF, and Ansar Din announced, in March 2017, a merger into the JNIM under the leadership of Iyad Ag Ghali, a Malian national (MacEachern, 2018, p.153). The merger, which bolstered the capacity of the newly formed JNIM, led to the intensification of attacks in northern and central Mali, Western Niger and north and eastern Burkina Faso.

The deteriorating security situation in the Sahel has elicited support from the international community resulting in a multiplicity of both international and regional military deployments. However, despite the deployments, terrorist activities are far from abating. While the African Union Commission (AUC) and its partners are strategizing innovative approaches to contain the scourge, the region is beginning to witness a resurgence of coup d'états that are threatening to worsen an already volatile situation. In August 2020 and May 2021, Mali experienced double coup d'états carried out by Colonel Assimi Goita, leading to the overthrow of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK) and Transitional President Bah N'Daw respectively. In Chad, Mahamat Deby was installed as the transitional President following the death of his father, Idris Deby Itno, in violation of the national constitution.

Conceptual Framework

The management of regional security challenges from within the context of multilateral institutional arrangements can be approached from diverse conceptual prisms. Overall, however, it is generally the case that where security has been undermined or is being threatened, three concepts—peace enforcement, peacekeeping, peace-making/building—have been applied (Banjo, 1997). When invoked and deployed these concepts are in themselves expressions of larger notions of international institutions and regimes. (This paper uses the notions of regime and international institutions interchangeably. The former deals with issue specific area whilst the latter deals with a broad range of issues). According to Krasner (1982) regimes are:

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sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations. Rules are specific prescriptions or proscriptions for action. Decision-making procedures are prevailing practices for making and implementing collective choice. (p. 185)

In *Anarchical Society,* Hedley Bull (1977) laid out the significance of rules and institutions in the international system, contending that they are: 'general imperative principles which require or authorize prescribed classes of persons or groups to behave in prescribed ways' (p.54). Bull argues that Institutions exist to facilitate compliance with rules by formulating, communicating, administering, enforcing, interpreting, legitimating, and adapting them. Keohane (1984) underscores the significance of regimes and international organisations, stating that the cooperative behaviour they foster 'require that the actions of separate individuals or institutions—which are not in preexistent harmony—be brought into conformity with one another through a process of policy coordination' (p.51). Compliance behaviour, or what is but the same thing, cooperative behaviour, is therefore the kernel of international relations.

Scholars (see among others Galbreath, 2008) have tried to explain the factors motivating states to cooperation in the international system. In this regard, two major theoretical standpoints—rationalism and constructivism—dominate the discuss. The Rationalist Perspective posits that state actors always seek those strategies which, for all intent and purposes, maximise benefits to themselves. States cooperate with the view to reducing transactional costs, where such costs are high, or deemed to be too high, international cooperation is stymied. Cooperation can be mutually beneficial. The Constructivist perspective argues that actors' action and reaction is a product of their values and perception of the world around them. While interest is important, it is not the sole motivation to action as shared values and norms continue to form the basis of social interaction.

This paper inclines towards an eclectic theoretical approach to the understanding of the development of regimes and international organisations. It subscribes to the view that state action and interaction and international organisation in general are the products of both a constellation of shared interests as well as shared values. and norms.

The African Union's Response to Security Challenges in the Sahel

One of the main aims of the African Union is the promotion of peace, security, and stability on the African continent. Since the transformation of the AU into an ambitious security regime, there have been significant developments on the continent with the clear demonstration of Africa's willingness through its pro-activeness in terms of its leaders' readiness to tackle the continent's security quagmires (Aning, 2008, p.9). African Union's zeal for security management has led to, first, the establishment of a formal institutional framework for conflict management, the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), through the AU's adoption, in 2002, of the Peace and Security Council Protocol, which represents a fundamental paradigm shift in Africa's approach to conflict management, and second, increasing collaborations between the United Nations and the African Union in peace and security matters (Badmus, 2015). Thus, the APSA becomes Africa's first continent-wide regional peace and security system; it represents African efforts to manage African security, for it provides an opportunity for the continent to break away from the age-old practice of overreliance on the international community to solve African conflicts (Kasumba and Debra, 2010).

The Constitutive Act provides for the right of the Union to intervene in a member state pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances: genocide and crimes against humanity—"one of the first organisations in the world to give itself such a clear mandate." (Aning, 2008, p.13). The creation of the African Union is of particular importance in the development of peace and security institutions in Africa. The African Union has moved away from the position of indifference (the case for its predecessor—the OAU) and is now addressing issues of peace and

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security constructively. The AU Peace and Security Council was set up to be a collective security and early-warning arrangement to facilitate timely and efficient response to conflict and crisis situations in Africa.

In the conflict-prone Sahel region of Africa, the AU has further demonstrated its commitment to peace and security by ordering interventions since its inception in various conflicts cases (Bamidele, 2017, p.114). This clearly demonstrates African Union's growing security capacity and its determination to provide for the security of the people in the Sahel region. To achieve the aim of promoting peace, security and stability in the Sahel, the African Union has built comprehensive organisational structures around their commitment to peace and security as maintained by the United Nations. The structures they designed as well as the means to tackle insecurity in the Sahel region include the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the African Standby Force (ASF), the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel, coupled with cooperation with regional and international partners.

First, the key AU Organ for promoting peace and security in the Sahel region is the PSC which is the standing decision-making organ of the AU for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts. It is a collective security and early warning arrangement intended to facilitate timely and efficient responses to conflict and crisis situations not only in the Sahel region but in the whole of Africa. It is also the key pillar of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), which is the framework for promoting peace, security, and stability in Africa. Another structure put in place by the AU in response to the growing insecurities in the Sahel is the African Standby Force (ASF). The ASF was established to enable the Peace and Security Council of the AU to perform its responsibilities with respect to the deployment of peace support missions and interventions. The Force is composed of standby multidisciplinary contingents, with civilian and military components in their countries of origin and ready for rapid deployment at appropriate notice (Kimathi, 2016, p.9). For that purpose, the member states are to take steps to establish standby contingents for participation in peace support missions decided on by

the Peace and Security Council or in interventions authorized by the Assembly (Cilliers, and Sturman, 2002, p.101). The strength, type, and degree of readiness of the contingents, as well as their general location is determined in accordance with established African Union Peace Support Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

The functions of the ASF include, among others:

> Observation and monitoring missions; other types of peace support missions; intervention in a Member State in respect of grave circumstances or at the request of a Member State in order to restore peace and security, in accordance with Article 4(h) and of the Constitutive Act; preventive deployment in order to prevent: (a dispute or a conflict from escalating, an ongoing violent conflict from spreading to neighbouring areas or States, and the resurgence of violence after parties to a conflict have reached an agreement); peace-building, including post-conflict disarmament and demobilization; humanitarian assistance to alleviate the suffering of civilian population in conflict areas and support efforts to address major natural disasters; and any other functions as may be mandated by the Peace and Security Council or the Assembly. (Cilliers, and Sturman, 2002, p.101)

In the performance of these functions, the ASF work in cooperation with the United Nations and its Agencies, relevant international and regional organizations, national authorities, and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) where appropriate.

Over the past decades, the AU has carried out several missions in the Sahel to sustain security in the region. These missions were carried out through the structures and means put in place by the AU. For instance, the largest peace operation in the Sahel region against insecurity embarked upon by the AU since its inception has, arguably, been in the Darfur region of Sudan. In 2003, two rebel groups namely, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) launched an attack against the government's installations in

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Darfur (Appiah, 2014, p. 142). Responding to this threat, the government conducted a counter insurgency campaign against the rebels and their supporters. Due to this conflagration between the government and the rebels, an estimate of over 30,000 deaths and displacement close to 1.2 million people were recorded by August 2004 (Williams, 2009, p.97). The Sudanese government refused a UN peace operation in its country and the AU was therefore left with the lead role in the management of the crisis. On April 8, 2004, a Humanitarian Cease-fire Agreement was brokered between the Sudanese government, the SLM/A and the JEM. This was later followed in May 2004 by the Addis Ababa Agreement, which enabled the formation of a Cease-fire monitoring Commission (McDoom, 2004, p.24). The AU deployed military observers to monitor the cease-fire agreement, which led to the formation of the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS). The cease-fire agreement did not hold and the military observers of the AU "were left to monitor events in an on-going war zone" (Goering, 2004, p.3). Persistent calls from the international community to alleviate the suffering of civilians in Darfur led to the expansion of AMIS in several phases. Between October 2004 and April 2005, AMIS strength increased from 3,320 to 7,560 to accommodate the increasing mandate of the Mission (Appiah, 2014). In 2007, the AU and the UN collaborated to intervene through the AU/UN hybrid operation in Darfur.

Another means through which insecurity in the Sahel region has been curtailed is through the activities of the G-5 Sahel Joint Task Force. As the main influencer of the coastal states' security, the monitoring of the situation in the Sahel has always been important. The heads of states of the G5 Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger) decided in 2017 to form a joint force against these terrorist and violent extremist organizations with the support of the international community (ACSRT, 2020). The Task Force with military and police components has been conducting operations through the territories of the members up to 50 km on each side of the borders. While the 5000-manned force main task is combat terrorism and organized crime, they are also mandated for supporting humanitarian actions and the return of displaced people

(Rupesinghe, 2018). This task force has received considerable support and backing by the AU to curtail the issues of insecurity in the region as well as its spill over effects. Equally, in the Lake Chad Basin, the AU backed the emergence of a Multinational Joint Task Force to combat terrorism in the region. In 2015, a decision made by the African Union to deploy a regional security force to address the threat of Boko Haram was welcomed by the UN Special Envoy for West Africa (UN Africa Renewal, 2022). The aim of the AU Task Force was to build on the initial steps taken by the countries of the Lake Chad Basin who were already in talks to form a joint task force to combat regional crimes and cross-border attacks. The funding for the MNJTF has been bilateral (the preferred method for the USA and France) and through an AU African Peace Facility, for which the EU was the most significant contributor. This support has had the potential additional impact of reinforcing domestic political authority in Cameroon and Chad.

The AU's response to insecurity in the Sahel, made possible by terrorist groups and violent extremists, is evident in the AU intervention in the Malian Crisis- the Tuareg Rebellion. On 10 January 2012, the Tuareg group, the movement pour la liberation de l'Azawad (MNLA); Ansar Dine, an Islamic splinter group from the MNLA (whose political leadership was based in Mauritania); as well as Islamic extremists, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the mouvement pour l'unicite et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO), launched attacks against the Malian army forces that led to them taking over the northern two-thirds of the country, including the towns of Gao, Timbuktu, and Kidal (Oluwadare, 2014, p.16). The Malian government's response to the mujahedin threat was weakened by the coup staged by the United States-trained Captain Amadoun Sanogo in March 2012 (Oluwadare, 2014, p.18). Following the March 2012 coup, a support and follow-up group on the situation in Mali consisting of the AU and the representatives from ECOWAS, the 'core countries' (Algeria, Mauritania, and Niger), the EU, and key bilateral donors, began to meet regularly. The AU pushed for better coordination of domestic and international efforts, and stressed the need to restore state authority, security sector reform, and elections. A harmonized joint concept of operations—the 'strategic

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operational framework'—emerged which sought to align the Malian army's plan with those of a sub-regional force, African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) (Oluwadare, 2014, p.18). The mission was intended to back a poorly equipped 5000-strong Malian army in three phases: to build its capacity; to recover occupied parts of the north and reduce the terrorist threat; and to transition to stabilisation activities to consolidate state authority in northern Mali.

The plan also stressed the importance of longer-term security sector reform of the Malian army. As a result, a joint coordination mechanism was established involving the AU, the ministers of defence of Mali, ECOWAS' troop-contributing states, the neighbouring 'core countries', the UN, and other international donors. By December 2012, the force was authorized, with the UN Security Council urging AFISMA to take all necessary steps to rebuild Mali's army; help the government to extend its authority to the north; protect civilians; and help stabilise the country after military operations (Badmus, 2015, p.88). However, to ensure efficient deployment of AFISMA to Mali, the AU asked for a logistical support package to be provided to the mission through assessed UN contributions, as had occurred with the AU/UN hybrid operation in Darfur in 2007.

The Multilateral backdrop to the AU's Peace and Security Efforts

The nature of African countries' security environment and the inability of the African Union to satisfactorily institutionalise security mechanisms to solve Africa's manifold security problems and guarantee basic security in the Sahel have, for many years, forced the AU to look for and rely on the broader international community, especially the UN, to solve its conflicts and deal with the insecurities in the Sahel region. To tackle security issues in the Sahel and by extension, other parts of Africa, the AU works in conjunction with numerous partners in the quest for peace and security in Africa. To fully operationalize its programmes in peace and security, partners like the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), international communities like the European Union, the World Bank and the G8; the United Nations and other important groups like Civil Society have been

working hand in hand with the AU in other to build a robust peace and security architecture.

African Union considers the RECs such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA): the East African Community (EAC), among others to be essential in the implementation and execution of the African Peace and Security Architecture and its programmes (Appiah, 2014, p.168). The AU, in cooperating with the RECs, hopes to profit from the "regions comparative advantage in military and security matters, but also from the experience with peace operations in the case of Western, Eastern and Southern Africa." (Kimathi, 2016, p.8). The AU and the RECs in 2007, signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which defines the relations between them in the area of peace and security. Included in the objectives of this agreement were the need for RECs to contribute to the full operationalization of the Africa Peace and Security Architecture; the need to ensure regular information exchange on the activities of the parties to the agreement and to design ways in which peace and security-related activities can be implemented. The RECs were also to contribute to and regularly review their contribution to the major components of the APSA (African Union, 2007). This memorandum ensures that "the primary responsibility for peace and security remains squarely with the RECs, while the AU serves as an authoritative clearinghouse and framework for all initiatives" (Kimathi, 2016. p.9).

The role of the RECs in helping the AU to safeguard lives and curtail insecurity in the Sahel was evident during the 2012 Tuaregs insurrection in Mali. During this period, both ECOWAS and AU leaders endorsed the plan to establish a joint coordination mechanism in November 2012, and asked the UN Security Council to authorize a 3,300-strong African-led international support mission to Mali—with infantry units, air assets, and formed police units—for an initial one-year period. The force was authorized in December 2012 in a resolution drafted by France. Be that as it may, the United Nations which has the primary responsibility to maintain peace and security in the world has supported the AU's African

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Peace and Security endeavours variously. The United Nations, since the inception of the APSA, has contributed variously, in terms of personnel, financial and equipment support, to many peacekeeping efforts in the Sahel (Peck, 2005). Mention can also be made of Darfur between 2004 and 2007. The UN has also ordered an African-led intervention in the crises in Mali, backing an initial intervention by France to push back Islamist forces from advancing on the South, and possibly Bamako, which is deemed a threat to the entire sub-region. The UN has thus supported the AU in her quest for peace and security, as it did the OAU. This is despite her not always been appreciated because of its failure to act effectively in some of the most challenging security situations in the Sahel.

In addition to national and regional efforts in the fight against violent extremism in the Sahel, international support in the fight against violent extremism in the region is pervasive. The French-led Takuba forces and the European Union Training Mission in Mali have a Sahel-centred approach (African Union, 2022). Similarly, although external multilateral and bilateral funding to the AU to tackle insecurity in the Sahel comes from many sources, the European Union (EU) and the G8 provide the most significant support for the APSA. The EU, through its frameworks, the Africa Peace Facility (APF) established in 2004 and the African Strategy of 2005, committed to support the development of the APSA by recognizing the central role of peace and security in the achievement of development goals (Middleton, 2022). The APF was established in 2004 as a response to the request by African leaders at the Maputo Summit of 2003 for such an initiative. For instance, The European Union is also active in funding projects which aim to strengthen border control and collaboration among the states. The G8, on the other hand, adopted an African Action Plan in 2002 and committed to "provide technical and financial assistance to the AU so that African countries and regional and sub-regional organisations are able to engage more effectively to prevent and resolve violent conflict on the continent, and undertake peace support operations in accordance with the United Nations Charter" (OECD, 2013). Several Action Plans followed the 2002 Plan culminating in the pledge to train and equip,

where appropriate, a total of 75,000 troops for peace support operations worldwide but focusing on Africa especially in the Sahel region and other conflict-prone areas in the continent. For instance, US AFRICOM is committed to support the fight against violent extremism throughout the Sahel region. International partners are keen on the cooperation in development of interoperability, joint training, and capacity building.

Conclusion

The African Union, since its establishment, has ensured that the principles of non-interference and sovereignty no longer shield states from external scrutiny and even military intervention. The right to intervention, as enshrined in the founding documents of the AU, is not only an innovation but also a stark departure from the then OAU's stance on intervention. From the norms of sovereignty to those of intervention and the unconstitutional changes in government, the AU has demonstrated its commitment to stabilize the conflict-prone Sahel region. This is evident in the structures put in place by the AU as well as its multilateral cooperation with regional and international bodies to curtail insecurity in the Sahel. Despite the willingness of the AU to safeguard the stability of the Sahel region, her attempts have been deemed, in some instances, as not good enough. Most cases of violent conflict in the Sahel have received late response from the AU to respond and restore order. In the final analysis, the reality of every crisis demands swift response from the AU if law and order is to be restored in the Sahel or anywhere on the continent. The paucity of human, material, technical and other wherewithal at the disposal of the AU has compelled diverse forms of partnerships and collaborations. The AU leans on the support of development partners from diverse backdrops including from the EU, UN, and the OECD. Others include China, Japan, Germany, and France as well as the US and Canada.

Although they are not without their benefits, peace and stability delivered on the wings of multilateral arrangements have not always been without their problems and challenges (Camara, 2019). Given the seminal levels of the exogenous components of multilateral arrangements, often,

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they end up serving as the apertures through which unwarranted foreign interferences are introduced into the crisis of the Sahel. The tendency of the crisis in the Sahel to spill over into other countries of the region is very rife. Since the AU's response to these insecurity challenges requires concerted efforts at regional and continental levels, the paper affirms that such arrangements have implications for multilateral diplomacy as there is the need to manage the efforts of international partners and power blocs in the region. If such diplomacies are conducted appropriately, it could signal an era of positive change in the Sahel region. It could also imply a regime of development and economic prosperity. On the other hand, if efforts by the AU are not adequately managed, it could portend a Sahel region dotted with unchecked interests by superpower brokers, a 'cosmetic' cessation of security challenges and a region riddled with poor economic development indices and other drivers of insecurity.

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