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IN MEMORY OF ANDREI YURYEVICH URNOV



Andrei Yuryevich Urnov was a distinguished Soviet and Russian diplomat, Doctor of Historical Sciences, who specialized in African studies and international relations, and a regular contributor to the “Journal of the Institute for African Studies.” From 2008 to 2025, he worked at the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. In his work, he combined practical experience in the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs¹ with academic research in African studies. He held the diplomatic rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary. He was awarded with high honors, including the Order of the Badge of Honor, the Order of Friendship of Peoples, and medals from several African countries.

His specialized diplomatic training at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, coupled with his extensive practical experience, enabled him to approach the study of such a multifaceted topic as the US African strategy in a highly professional and systematic way. He used his original analysis, based on a problem-chronological approach, as well as on numerous documents, including those from US government agencies, and reports from international news agencies. He has published six monographs on this topic [Urnov 2015; Urnov 2017; Urnov 2020a; Urnov 2021; Urnov 2023; Urnov 2024], as well as numerous articles in the “Journal of the Institute for African Studies” [Urnov 2018; Urnov 2019; Urnov 2020b; Urnov 2022], “Asia and Africa Today,” “World Economy and International Relations,” and other academic periodicals, which comprise together a coherent research program and have long since found their place on the shelves of Russian scholars in African Studies and International Relations.

¹ On the death of A.Yu. Urnov. *MFA of Russia*. 11.08.2025. (In Russ.). https://mid.ru/ru/activity/shots/vnutrivedomstvennye_novosti/nekrologi_pamyati_kolleg/2040970/ (accessed: 01.12.2025)

The administration and staff of the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the editorial board of the “Journal of the Institute for African Studies” express their deepest condolences to the family and friends of A.Yu. Urnov, who passed away on August 10, 2025.

Below is an essay about A.Yu. Urnov, written by his colleague at the Institute for African Studies and his workmate, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor V.G. Shubin.

COMRADE ANDREI

I met A.Yu. Urnov while I was a student at MGIMO, where he was a year ahead of me. We met again a few years later when I started working at the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee after leaving military service in 1969.

By that time, Andrei Yuryevich had already been working as a desk assistant in the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU. After graduating, he was offered a position in the Department, initially as a junior desk assistant. This typically involved interpreting. A. Urnov most often dealt with guests from the United States. He translated for various people, including state leader N.S. Khrushchev.

In 1966, there was a marked shift both in the area and level of his work in the Department; he was appointed to the position of desk officer, in the African Sector. Andrei Yuryevich was then under 30 years old, which was considered too young for an “official with responsibilities” at the time. His responsibilities included maintaining ties with political forces in the countries of East and Southern Africa, the most important of which were the national liberation movements in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Namibia. A. Urnov occupied this position for over fifteen years, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that he was directly involved in all significant events in the Soviet Union's relations with them. He “had a hand” in all decisions regarding assistance to fighters against colonialism and apartheid made by our country's leadership.

For example, when Tanzania closed the military camp of the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa on its territory in 1969, he facilitated the decision to send fighters for training in the USSR, thereby helping to preserve the core of the ANC's military organization. He also played a direct role in sending groups of Soviet military specialists to Angola to train fighters of the ANC, the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU).

In 1982, his responsibilities expanded significantly when he became head of the Africa Sector within the International Department. This made him responsible for relations with all African countries south of the Sahara.

I had the opportunity to travel to African countries with A. Urnov several times, and, perhaps, two of these trips were the most interesting. In 1975, even before Mozambique gained independence, when a transitional government was in power, A.Yu. Urnov arrived there as part of a Soviet public (and, in fact, the first political) delegation, which visited five provinces and 11 cities in that country, and, together with other members, he participated in 30 rallies.

Another trip to Angola in early 1984 was related to the emerging tensions between that country's leadership and SWAPO. Sam Nujoma, the president of SWAPO, had the knack of remaining outwardly calm even in a clearly unfavorable situation. In conversations with us in the presence of other Namibians or Angolans, he would show no signs of anxiety, and only after descending with Andrei Yuryevich into a dugout, inaccessible to outside ears, did he tell him about the difficulties he was facing. It is

worth noting that this level of trust with the leader of SWAPO during the struggle for independence contributed to A.Yu. Urnov's successful work as an ambassador to Namibia from 1990 to 1994.

While working in the International Department, despite being extremely busy, A.Yu. Urnov defended his PhD's and then Doctor of Sciences dissertations on South Africa's policy and published two monographs, one in Russian, titled "South Africa's Policy in Africa" [Urnov 1982], and the other in English, titled "South Africa Against Africa (1966–1986)" [Urnov 1988].

Let me digress for a moment: during a conference in South Africa, I witnessed A. Urnov presenting a copy of this book to Frederik Botha, also known as "Pik" Botha, who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs in the racist South African government for many years.

It was at this point that his career took a new turn: in the summer of 1986, he was appointed Deputy Head of the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee. His responsibilities now included Latin America and South Asia, and he had the opportunity to visit Mexico and India in his new role. However, due to his position, he had to focus most of his attention on Afghanistan. He not only visited Kabul but also served on the Central Committee commission that dealt with almost all matters related to relations with the country.

Andrei Yuryevich's life changed again after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, this time radically. Having worked on Staraya Square, where the Central Committee departments were housed, for nearly three decades, he moved to Smolenskaya Square to work in the building of the Soviet MFA. On August 15, 1990, A.Yu. Urnov was appointed as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Namibia. This appointment was perceived by the SWAPO leadership as an expression of Moscow's special relationship with that country. During the ceremony of presenting credentials, Sam Nujoma himself looked at the ambassadorial uniform of A.Yu. Urnov and said: "Comrade Andrei, I did not know you were an admiral."

Andrei Yuryevich's tenure in Namibia as Ambassador of the USSR, and then Russia, coincided with one of the most difficult periods in our country's history. But although he was not able to achieve all that he had planned, it should be acknowledged that he had laid the foundations for the good relations that still exist between Moscow and Windhoek. After Namibia, he held other diplomatic posts: Ambassador to Armenia; Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Department for Relations with Subjects of the Federation, Parliament, and Socio-Political Organizations; Ambassador-at-Large; and Head of the Russian Working Group on the Caspian Sea. Even after his official retirement in 2004, he continued his diplomatic work, serving for three years as Deputy Secretary-General of the Permanent International Secretariat of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.

In 2008, Andrei Yuryevich, as he himself put it, "returned to Africa," becoming a Leading and soon the Principal Research Fellow at the Institute for African Studies. He initiated his work there with the publication of the monograph "Africa and the UN at the End of the First Decade of the 21st Century" [Urnov 2011]. This was followed by six books on US policy in Africa, organized chronologically [Urnov 2015; Urnov 2017; Urnov 2020a; Urnov 2021; Urnov 2023; Urnov 2024].

But his most significant and valuable work is undoubtedly the monograph "Foreign Policy of the USSR during the Cold War and the New Thinking" [Urnov 2014], to which he dedicated many years of efforts. It's not an exaggeration to say that this book deserves

the attention of anyone who is interested in our country's history and wants to understand the twists and turns of world politics after World War II.

To use the traditional expression, the Motherland highly valued the merits of A.Yu. Urnov, awarding him the Order of Friendship of Peoples, the Badge of Honor, and medals. His achievements were also recognized by our friends: in 2015, he was awarded the Order of the Companions of O.R. Tambo (in silver) by the South African President Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma for his "excellent contribution to the fight for the liberation of the people of South Africa."²

* * *

During his long life, the author of this essay has encountered many leaders, including intelligent, calm, and kind ones. However, Andrei Yuryevich, who was my official supervisor for almost ten years and even more years in fact, combined all of these qualities, and that doesn't happen often.

Prof. V.G. Shubin, Doctor of Historical Sciences

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² Ambassador Andrey Yurievich Yurnov. The Order of the Companions of O.R. Tambo in Silver. *The Presidency. Republic of South Africa*. <https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/ambassador-andrey-yurievich-urnov> (accessed: 12.01.2025)

Focus of the Issue:

AFRICAN IDENTITY AND SECURITY
CHALLENGES

Research article

**ETHNOGENESIS AND THE WAR IN RWANDA.
THE POLICIES OF OTHERNESS**

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Abstract. Anthropological analysis has long rested on the premise that cultural borders were somehow linear, based on bounds between people who essentially shared a common culture, with particular differences distinguishing each cohort from all others. Accordingly, identity bounds would possibly find direct representation in geopolitical borders.

Mainstream public discourse absorbed such a perspective, reproducing the simplistic view that geographical borders and social isolation of aggregates were the critical factors in defining cultural diversity and similarity between peoples. Social anthropologists, for their part, obliquely supported such a vision by adopting a highly vague concept of “society.”

The work of Fredrik Barth, among others, marked the transition to a new era of ethnographic studies, parting with anthropological notions of cultures as isolated entities and ethnicity as a primordialist bond. From then on, analysis of categorical ethnic distinctions did not depend anymore on the absence of mobility, contact, or interaction, but rather on the ongoing negotiations between communities as a key factor structuring identity bounds. African post-colonial studies provided the most valuable materials for the consideration of the social ontology of ethnicity, which is here analyzed with a particular focus on Rwanda. Such analytical tools, here integrated with a post-structuralist discourse theory, are still crucial to prevent essentialism, ethnicism, racism, and culturalism as means of social discrimination in the context of the ethno-states.

Keywords: culturalism, epistemology, ethnicity, Fredrik Barth, social anthropology, Rwanda, race

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of ethnicity is suffering from some kind of anachronism. As ethnic framing has been steadily getting less and less relevant under the academic gaze (where it was born), it seems to have parallelly gained an increased legitimacy both on public and governmental grounds. Starting at least from the second half of the past century, anthropological and ethnographical accounts have been confronted with a deep uncertainty over the meaning (and political consequences) of ethnic labeling, having furthermore to acknowledge a striking complicity with the colonialist and imperialist projects whose domination paradigms ethnicization helped to build and validate.

While contemporary anthropology has gradually gotten rid of ethnicization, it is now in the popular domain that we find an abundance of claims featuring rich catalogues of ethnic proposals. A wide variety of mass culture, for instance, presents books with catalogues of ethnic music, ethnic cuisine, ethnic art, ethnic handicraft, and so on.

But what does this “ethnic” labeling actually represent? When does a war become an ethnic war? What makes a recipe an ethnic recipe? What elements are crucially distinctive for an identity to be considered as an ethnic identity? Hereafter, we will argue it may be nothing else than the consequence of a tendency anthropology itself baptized, not without irony, as “ethnocentrism”—namely, the attitude to consider one’s own culture as the meter to measure all others, involving the habit of ascribing ethnicity statuses to exotic external players, whoever they may be.

Often, such labeling simply represents the pretension to indicate any cultural phenomena coming from any part of the globe other than Europe, the US, Canada, the UK, New Zealand, or Australia, all grouped under the geographically dubious label of “Western” cultures. Under such an ethnocentric gaze, Malaysia or Zambia, Bolivia or Morocco would equally represent as many “ethnic” cultures next to the dominant “Western” culture.

Such a vulgar version of a long-deconsecrated mindset has also made its way into the reports of mainstream newsprints, mass-media channels, and government agencies. From BBC to CNN, from Al Jazeera to Reuters, news reports regularly describe a variety of conflicts, civil uprisings, and guerrilla wars as “ethnic” conflicts, “ethnic” tensions, and so forth.¹ In the ’90s, nearly all reports described the Rwandan genocide as the outcome

¹ See: Why is ethnic violence surging in Ethiopia? *Al Jazeera*. 19.04.2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/19/why-is-ethnic-violence-surg-ing-in-ethiopia> (accessed: 03.11.2025); Bytyci F. Serbs in Kosovo clash with police as ethnic tensions flare. *Reuters*. 11.12.2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/serbs-kosovo-block-roads-clash-with-police-ethnic-tensions-worsen-2022-12-11> (accessed: 03.11.2025); Manipur: Thousands displaced as ethnic clashes grip north-eastern state. *BBC*. 09.05.2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-65522719> (accessed: 03.11.2025); Formanek I., El Damanhoury K., Haq S.N. 10,000 reported killed in one West Darfur city, as ethnic violence ravages Sudanese region. *CNN*. 26.07.2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/07/26/africa/sudan-west-darfur-thousands-killed-intl> (accessed: 03.11.2025).

of an “ethnic” clash, a fight between ancestrally different, incompatible “ethnic” groups. Something similar happened with the Bosnian civil war. However, on a closer look, most of those conflicts were rather the violent aftermaths of Western imperialism.

Some state institutions seem to perform no better in such categorization of peoples. A few years ago, under a paragraph entitled “Measuring Racial and Ethnic Diversity for the 2020 Census”, the US Census Bureau described its curious analytical methodology, mentioning ethnic and racial criteria as follows: “These diversity calculations require the use of mutually exclusive racial and ethnic (nonoverlapping) categories. For our analyses, we calculate the Hispanic or Latino population of any race as a category; each of the race alone, non-Hispanic groups as individual categories; and the Multiracial non-Hispanic group as a distinct category. The following groups are used in the diversity calculations:

“Hispanic;
White alone, non-Hispanic;
Black or African American alone, non-Hispanic;
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, non-Hispanic;
Asian alone, non-Hispanic;
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, non-Hispanic;
Some Other Race alone, non-Hispanic;
*Multiracial, non-Hispanic.”*²

What assumptions about ethnicity and race are to support such borders and divisions is yet to be understood. Arguably, people that are united under the “Black or African American” group could very well consider each other as different people if only one of them comes from Somalia and the other one from Senegal. Such uses of racial and ethnic grouping still replicate the analytical standards enhanced by the colonialist paradigm, revived right here in the 21st century.

To mention just one more case, consider a legislative impasse that emerged in a European Commission report on data collection practices in the European Union (EU): “Racial, ethnic and national origin, minority religion, language and cultural traditions have not been clearly distinguished in law, but are instead recognised as intrinsically interlinked. [...] The Permanent Court of International Justice stated that a (minority) community is “a group of persons living in a given country or locality, having a race, religion, language and traditions of their own and united by this identity of race, religion, language and traditions in a sentiment of solidarity, with a view to preserving their traditions, maintaining their form of worship, ensuring the instruction and upbringing of their children in accordance with the spirit and traditions of their race and rendering mutual assistance to each other.”³

² Measuring Racial and Ethnic Diversity for the 2020 Census. *United States Census Bureau*. 04.08.2021. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2021/08/measuring-racial-ethnic-diversity-2020-census.html> (accessed: 23.02.2024)

³ Farkas L. Data collection in the field of ethnicity. *European Commission*. 2017. https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2021-09/data_collection_in_the_field_of_ethnicity.pdf (accessed: 23.02.2024)

Seen up close, this definition seems able to describe not just any possible minority group, but also any major or minor social community that has ever existed throughout all known history of *Homo sapiens* on the planet. We are given the information that all the subjects of such communities are united in solidarity by cultural traits. Is that actually our ultimate cornerstone with regard to social identity?

ETHNICITY AND GROUPING CRITERIA

In this paragraph, we will discuss the genealogy, purpose, and shift in meaning of the idea of ethnicity as it has been defined in 20th century anthropological theory. We address the function of the category in relation to the earlier notion of race, and highlight the limits that brought to its overcoming across the post-colonial discursive approach at the end of the century.

What the classic paradigm of anthropology meant by the concept of “ethnic group” was roughly a distinguished ensemble of human beings who generally shared a land, a language, a religion, a genealogical bond, and what we could call, more widely, a social structure. A certain number of common criteria were taken into consideration, such as language, a name, customs, land, values, lineage, the awareness of belonging to the group, etc.

One of the best definitions of this period was probably given in the 1940s by British-American anthropologist Ashley Montagu, in his book “Man’s Most Dangerous Myth. The Fallacy of Race”: “An ethnic group represents one of a number of populations comprising the single species *Homo sapiens*, which individually maintain their differences, physical and cultural, by means of isolating mechanisms such as geographic and social barriers. [...] Where these barriers are of low power, neighboring groups will intergrade or hybridize with one another. Where these barriers are of high power, such ethnic groups will tend to remain distinct or to replace each other geographically or ecologically” [Montagu 1997: 186].

In the same work, Montagu describes what kind of criteria are to be considered relevant for distinguishing the groups in the continuum: “The term ‘ethnic group’ denotes a self-perceived social grouping, within or without a larger social grouping, which is distinguished by a variety of traits. These include religious and linguistic characteristics, geographic or national origin, aesthetic cultural patterns, a socially transmitted way of life and sometimes more or less distinctive physical traits. None of these characteristics taken alone constitute an ethnic group. It is the association of all of them that does so” [Montagu 1997: 527].

Not only we can see here a well-defined idea of a human group pursuing a social identity by sharing cultural traits; we also find a pivotal reference to the notion of geographic and social barriers. This attempt to define some purely cultural aggregates as local concrete groups, elaborating representations of a common historical and social identity, still presupposed the existence of such groups on the field. The articulation and association of cultural traits within a community represented therefore the “essence” of each specific group. And this essence was identified for a reason.

In fact, the motive why the concept of ethnic group was proposed in the first place had to do with the need to find an alternative to another identity principle, another kind of essence able to sort people: the dangerous notion of race, which had first been used to distinguish human beings on the basis of biological phenotypical differences, advanced as a distinctive criterion to establish group demarcation. Montagu himself gave an account of those concerns:

“The concept of an ‘ethnic group’ is quite different from that associated with the term race. The phrase ethnic group represents a different way of looking at populations, an open, non-question-begging way [...]. It avoids the reductionist or ‘nothing but’ fallacy, that is to say, the notion that people are nothing but the resultant of their biological heredity [...] The emphasis is shifted to the fact that the human is a uniquely cultural creature as well as a physical organism” [Montagu 1997: 526–527].

With this operation, instead of races, it was now human cultures that began to be considered as juxtaposed mosaic tiles, where every piece was perceived as a homogeneous social aggregate whose members shared a history, a language, a territory, a religion, etc., and on such a basis could claim a common identity. Consequently, every cluster was considered to be different from the next one. Despite some early epistemological criticisms [see Leach 1945], the definitional haziness about what cultural trait should be considered as distinctive to describe a group as an ethnic unit was generally viewed as a virtue, in contrast to the rigid pretensions of the quasi-biological notion of race.

Montagu cites here H.B. English and A.C. English’s “A Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychological and Psychoanalytical Terms”: “Ethnic group is an intentionally vague or general term used to avoid some of the difficulties of race. The ethnic group may be a nation, a people (such as the Jews), a language group (the Navajo Nation), a sociologically defined so-called race (the African American), or a group bound together in a coherent cultural entity by a religion (the Amish)” [Montagu 1997: 525–6].

The adoption of the term “ethnic group” presented, therefore, the advantage of diverting exclusive attention from biometric factors, leaning towards the feelings of familiarity and companionship based on shared cultural materials: “The term *ethnic* is derived from the Greek *ethnos*, meaning a number of people living together, a company, a body of people. In the *Iliad*, Homer variously uses the word to mean a band of comrades, a tribe, a group. Pindar uses it in the sense of a family, a nation, a people” [Montagu 1997: 186].

In Montagu’s intentions, the new proposal would serve the hope of preventing racial prejudice inside the social arena. Unfortunately, however, although the change was no doubt driven by the most noble intentions, we now know too well that it simply substituted the basis for discrimination: it was now ethnicity and culture instead of race.

The openness of the cultural definition of ethnic groups made it possible to establish critical factors able to distinguish and identify human groups on a case-by-case basis. Also, none of those traits was either decisively binding or definitely differentiating: Mexicans and Argentinians may share the same language, yet they consider each others as different people; for centuries Jews around the world were lacking a common land, yet they were frequently considered as one ethnic group; Buddhists in Zhoushan and

Muslims in Lanzhou could all belong to a kind of Chinese identity, despite the religious demarcation; Pathans from Afghanistan and West Pakistan live far away, yet they may have no problem in considering each other as part of the same family; something alike happens with the Hmong people, scattered over Vietnam, China, and Myanmar, let alone the US and South American Guianas. On the contrary, the Arsi, Laki, Amhara, Macha, Shoa Galla all live in Ethiopia, yet they consider themselves as different peoples. Ethnographic evidence is abundant.

In summary, the classical ethnic labeling proposal was meant to describe a number of uniform human groups supposedly identified by the fact of sharing the same “culture” (language, tradition, laws, land, beliefs, etc.). This demarcation principle was resting upon three main assumptions [Barth 1969]:

First, geographical and social isolation were key factors in maintaining cultural difference;

Second, ethnic definition took for granted the absolute, static, unchanging character of such an identity;

Third, nearly no attention was given to the creation and emergence of new cultures, groups, and identities.

In the following decades, with the decolonization of Africa, this perspective entered into crisis, as many scholars underlined the arbitrary and constructed character of ethnic belonging itself, highlighting the political determinants that underlie the very genesis of ethnic groups.

From S.F. Nadel [Nadel 1942] to Meyer Fortes [Fortes 1945], from Paul Mercier [Mercier 1961] to Claude Meillassoux [Meillassoux 1964] and Emmanuel Terray [Terray 1969], until the exhaustive work of J.-L. Amselle and Elikia M'Bokolo, 20th-century anthropologists demonstrated that the practice of ethnic sorting had heavily corresponded to an arbitrary colonialist territorialization and had little to do with any pre-existing social relations among human beings. As early as 1958, William Watson demonstrated that the very constitution of the Mambwe people of Zambia as a tribe was a consequence of British colonization [Watson 1958]. In 1981, Jean-Pierre Dozon showed, studying the Bete people of Côte d'Ivoire, how the term “Bété” had been applied by the French administration to a territory arbitrarily carved out by the invaders within a cultural continuum (see [Dozon 1981; Amselle, M'Bokolo 1985]). Later, through the concept of *ethnoscapes*, Appadurai analyzed the interplay of imagination, power, and identity in the contemporary global processes of the “diasporic public spheres”, defining new forms of cultural hybridity and conflict [Appadurai 1996].

According to some of those researchers, more than a common “essence,” the members of a group would rather share discursive opposition dynamics with other communities, leading to the creation or enhancement of their own identity. Therefore, the very notion of “ethnicity” had to be ontologically reconsidered—when not just dropped, in favor of the analysis of the policies of difference and the policies of identity deployed in each particular case. We will focus below on the specific case of Rwandan ethnic identities as an ethnographical illustration of such dynamics. Although we do not believe that ethnicities in Africa are somehow ontologically different from those in other places in the Global South or elsewhere in the world, we will here address the African post-

colonial context precisely because, after the prompts of Frederik Barth, it was the decolonization of this continent that led contemporary anthropologists to undertake the most relevant advance in theory.

IN-GROUP AND OUT-GROUP: THE OTHERNESS IDENTITY TAKES

Something went missing in Montagu's Greek etymological account on ethnicity. Something little, yet paramount. It is the context of where and how the term "ethnos" was used. In other words, the social meaning, or function, of such a term. As noticed by sociologist Anne-Marie Fortier, the word "*ethnos*" [ἔθνος], meaning "*people, nation, class, caste, tribe; or a number of people accustomed to live together,*" was used as part of a specific action in the ancient world: the practice of naming other people, namely *inferior* people, *barbarian* people. The clarification is not a meaningless one: "This early use would often describe people whose location or conduct was in some way outside of 'the sphere of the Greek social normality.' Aristotle used it for foreign or barbarous nations, whereas Herodotus did not use the term *ethnos* when describing the Greeks. In the New Testament, *ethnos* is used to mean non-Christian or non-Jewish, Gentile, heathen. "Ethnikos" then appeared to be almost synonymous with *barbaros*" [Fortier 1994: 213].

Fortier further explains that it was only later, when the Greeks were representing the most prominent religious "other" under the Ottoman Empire, that such use changed. Interestingly, *ethnos* and ethnocentrism have coincided since the very beginning. We will argue this attitude may actually be connected with the notion of identity itself, and more precisely that ethnicity can be considered as a mode of the opposition identity/otherness, in-group/out-group in the same cognitively structural sense that was explored by Françoise Héritier [1996] with regards to the masculine-feminine demarcation.

But let's now step back to ethnic grouping and barriers. We've seen how the essentialist view on ethnic groups defined them as units emanating "from the inside," from a core or nucleus, homogeneous and separated by social borders. As for the unifying factors, Kevin Yelvington observed that, in the 1970s, two schools were providing an explanation for the creation of such groups: instrumentalism [Cohen 1969] and primordialism [Epstein 1978]: "Instrumentalist models hold that, in the context of socioeconomic change, people with common interests form groups to pursue those interests, with ethnicity being the most effective unifying principle for the appeals to be made. In contrast, primordialists point to the potent, emotive symbols ethnicity entails and argue that, in the context of disorienting social change, people retire to their ethnic identity to meet emotional needs" [Yelvington 1991: 159].

In those same years, new definitions were developed, investigating the processes of historical, social, and symbolic interactions through which human cohorts perceived and represented not so much their own identity within the group, but rather their relations with other human ensembles. In particular, Fredrik Barth argued that ethnic identities and borders were precisely emerging by means of interaction, claiming they were the product of an interplay rather than isolation: "An empirical investigation [...] produces two discoveries which are hardly unexpected but which demonstrate the inadequacy of this

view. First, it is clear that boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them [...]. Secondly, one finds that stable, persisting and often vitally important social relations are maintained across such boundaries, and are frequently based precisely on the dichotomized ethnic statuses. In other words, ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interactions and acceptance, but are quite to the contrary often the very foundations on which embracing social systems are built” [Barth 1969: 9–10].

In the border-frontier dialectic, we consider the metaphor of borders as representing the criteria defining demarcation lines (or demarcation claims) and the metaphor of frontiers as portraying the access points culturally established to allow for the bridging of identities: the socially defined crossing protocols available to social agents. Liminality areas do represent a particularly challenging object of analysis, precisely as their existence does not call into question identity distinctions or cultural borders.

Interesting cases of double belonging to different groups came to confirm Barth’s definitions, where behaviors and beliefs belonging to distinct identities may be successfully integrated in one living subject but keep on being ascribed and categorized according to former ethnic distinctions: “Soraya married a Muslim missionary. [...] Despite her reconciliation with her Maranao identity, she still feels uncomfortable around many Maranao and resents what she perceives as their rejection of her. [...] She says she is determined to integrate herself in two cultures, Maranao tradition and Western modernism, retaining the positive aspects of Maranao custom and rejecting those that impede progress, including traditional marriage practices” [Bentley 1987: 32].

Anthropological literature further shows that cultural border crossings are indeed possible and happen according to given protocols, yet also in those cases ethnic distinctions are the usual tool applied to define belongings and relations. Even in short-term contexts, like the construction of consensus in an electoral period, individuals switching from one ethnic identity to another do not seem to form new ones through recombination [see Ferree 2012].

According to Barth, ethnic units are precisely *organizational types* within which social relations are structured. “Ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves, and thus have the characteristic of organizing interaction between people” [Barth 1969: 10]. Thinking of culture as a way to describe human behavior, one has then to expect that those behaviors and traits could change according to the wider context, an environment defined by political partnerships, economic ties, marriage alliances, migrations, etc.

From this perspective, the elements one ascribes to the in-group largely depend on the contextual otherness they relate to. What validates the ethnic group (or ethnic identity claims) is therefore the border itself, which depends on an external dynamic touchstone and is not called into question by the existence of a frontier allowing for the mediated blending with the otherness.

Michael Moerman provided a reflection based on some US reciprocal ethnic labelings: “In order to call themselves by an ethnic label, villagers are semantically required to use or imply a contrastive label for others. To phrase the issue somewhat more generally and accurately, using one member of a set of identifications provides the context which makes other members of that set appropriate. Using the label “Negro”

provides the context which makes labels like “White” or “Mexican” appropriate” [Moerman 1968: 62].

Some fifteen years earlier, this interaction was also described by Frantz Fanon as the cornerstone of the construction of a submissive Black identity, produced by the white man in a hierarchical narrative of domination. Paradoxically, European colonial administration and education produced a narrative of Blackness that became the standard adopted by Black people to think about themselves, stuck in what he called “an arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment” [Fanon 1986 (1952): 30]. “The Negro,” he wrote, “is unaware of it as long as his existence is limited to his own environment; but the first encounter with a white man oppresses him with the whole weight of his blackness” [Fanon 1986: 150].

More than specific cultural traits, ethnic groups were sustained by the articulation of the identical/different, in-group/out-group structure, both cognitively and socially. Distinction, demarcation, differentiation claims may well be considered the nucleus of identity borders. According to a strategic selection of traits and belongings, the same subject can then be considered as pertaining to several different groups and be equally excluded from others, sometimes with significant overlappings. Consequently, “similarities in habitus do not guarantee ethnic sensations, and differences in habitus do not preclude identification” [Yelvington 1991: 168].

Following Barth’s approach, the way was paved for the consideration of ethnicity as a context-sensitive, dynamic, political representation of identity. Foreshadowing some themes and perspectives of the discursive postcolonial African analysis that was just about to come, and particularly the interpretation of ethnicity as a narrative (and more: whose narrative?), Fredrik Barth further suggested that ethnic divisions and narratives could actually be *inducted* within a certain society: “What is needed to make ethnic distinctions emerge in an area? 1. a categorization of population sectors in exclusive and imperative status categories; 2. an acceptance of the principle that standards applied to one such category can be different from those applied to another” [Barth 1969: 17].

Ethnicity, in other words, results from a social ontology.

MAKING UP ETHNICITIES: RWANDAN COLONIZATION

In the 1980s, a new tradition of anthropologists brought to completion the deconstruction of ethnicity as an epistemological tool. They did so by highlighting the relevance of the relationships between global historical-economic processes and local dynamics, on the basis of which human groups discursively define their own identity or have it defined and imposed by external forces [Amselle, M’Boloko 1985]. It was shown how the concept of ethnicity had been the manifestation of an ideological grammar that reified historical processes and represented projects of socio-cultural identity, intended as the expression of concrete relationships of political influence, power, and strength.

The history of the European colonization of the African continent provided numerous cases of local groups of people that had been arbitrarily named and grossly made up, according to military agendas, embarrassing misinterpretations of social systems, and exploitative, predatory political interests: “When it comes to ethnicities, we are in the

presence of moving realities: here as elsewhere, no one is exclusively a member of an ethnic group, and individuals, like social groups, are or cease to be, depending on the place and time, members of one or another ethnic group. Ultimately, it is ethnology and colonialism that, by ignoring history or denying it, anxious to classify and name, have thus established ethnic labels” [Amselle, M’Bokolo 1985: 10].

The notorious Rwandan genocide represents a paradigmatic illustration of the lethal, discursive deployment of ethnic groups and boundaries at the hands of a political agenda.

In October 1990, a civil war began when the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) attacked Rwanda, entering from Uganda. The aggression of the RPF, which was composed of Tutsi descendants grown up in exile, had the purpose of putting an end to the one-party state controlled by the Hutu elite and allowing for the return of Tutsi refugees [Reydams 2021: 237]. Ever since 1994, when the mass killings started, British and US reports, among others, described the situation as a typical case of tribal, ethnic violence in Africa, a cruel fight between two ancestral ethnic groups divided by primordial antagonisms.

However, not only have scholars pointed out that “ethnic accounts or a ‘racial’ explanation of the genocide are untenable,” that “ethnic conflict had to be engineered” in Rwanda, and that “the cause is political and not social” [Hintjens 1999: 281], but also the very meaning of the Hutu/Tutsi distinction underwent intense historical and anthropological scrutiny. Social divisions in the region were an earlier phenomenon, dating back to the period before the genocide and even before Rwandan independence of 1962. However, the meaning, the function, and the criteria of such separation have been heavily modified first by European imperialism and afterwards by the ruling local elite.

When German and Belgian colonizers arrived in the region, in the last decades of the 1800s, a peculiar social-political system existed on the ground. It was an order based on the interdependence of three groups: shepherds, farmers, and hunter-gatherers. The shepherds were mostly Tutsi; the farmers, who constituted the majority of the population of the kingdom, were Hutu; the hunter-gatherers represented a small minority and were Twa pygmies. Bahutu, Batutsi, and Batwa were not three “ethnic groups” in the sense examined above, or at least, not yet: “What sunders the Hutus, Tutsis, and Twas is not language or religion but socioeconomic difference. It is eerily similar to the estate difference, which used to separate Catholic serf-peasants and Catholic Polish-Lithuanian nobles in the Austrian Empire’s crownland of Galicia until the mid-19th century” [Kamusella 2021: 12].

Yet, the invaders attributed to this social division not only a hierarchical but also a “racial” meaning, according to their own assumptions: “German and Belgian colonial administrators shared the stereotypical Western preconception that Africa was a kind of Europe at an ‘earlier or lower stage of development.’ [...] Hence, they tended to interpret the social—or rather, socioeconomic—difference between Tutsi and Hutus in the ‘medieval’ or ‘feudal’ terms of the ancien régime social order of unequal estates. [...] In this Eurocentric view, Tutsis were none other but nobles (lords), while Hutus were perceived to be serfs (vassals) of Tutsis” [Kamusella 2021: 13].

Tutsis were considered the politically pre-eminent group, as the kings and officials came from their aristocracy. From the Hutu aristocracy came the priests, who were in

charge of the rituals that ensured the well-being of the sovereign. When European colonizers took over, they abolished both the Tutsi monarchy and the ritual role of the Hutus: “In the spirit of the Rassenkunde (“science of race”), then quite popular in Europe and across the west, the German colonialists introduced to Rwanda and Burundi the myth that Hutus were local Bantus (“blacks”), while Tutsis supposedly stemmed from Ethiopia or even Mesopotamia. In this colonial arrangement, the latter were considered “whites,” or at least “white blacks,” in contrast to through and through “black” Hutus” [Kamusella 2021: 14].

Looking for interlocutors to exercise their political influence, they turned to the kings, that is, the Tutsis. The Tutsi aristocracy then converted to Catholicism, abandoning its ancient religion and accordingly acquiring a new power over the rest of the population, based on the exclusive and complicit relationship with the colonizers. They were further ensured economic advantages and, in some cases, a European education. Hutus, by contrast, remained excluded from those privileges and found themselves as simple peasants with no other social meaning left than the function of being exploited by the Tutsi rulers under European direction. “The royal courts of Rwanda and Burundi, which had been seeking to centralize and consolidate their rule even before the arrival of the Europeans, recognized a clear opportunity and sought to reinforce the mistaken European interpretations of Rwandan society. Rwandan intellectuals worked with Catholic missionaries to develop a history that would conform to European racial expectation” [Longman 2002: 351].

Historian Tomasz Kamusella showed how, under such sway, local precolonial social institutions of *uburetwa* and *ubuhake*, relations of forced labor and unequal patronage, have been taken over by the colonialists to serve as useful instruments of indirect rule, especially for extracting taxes from the territory [2021: 13-14]. In doing so, colonizers changed the meaning of such traditions, relations, and identities, ignoring that, unlike in the European medieval model, *uburetwa* and *ubuhake* did not prohibit social mobility. The notion of two “exclusive and incompatible Hutu and Tutsi identities was constructed gradually,” wrote Helen Hintjens. “Such identities came to be perceived as polar opposites, where once they had been based on material relations of unequal but mutual inter-dependence” [Hintjens 1999: 251]. Moreover, “in pre-colonial Burundi, the same individual could be both Tutsi in relation to clients, and Hutu in relation to patrons” [Hintjens 249–250].

In the 1930s, colonizers implemented a “rationalization” of labor and revenue extraction, requiring “bureaucratization and ubiquitous control over spatial and social movement, which led to the gradual introduction of ‘identity booklets’” [Kamusella 2021: 14]. Those Identity Cards mandatorily featured a rigid, univocal “race/tribe” affiliation to one of three available kinds: Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa.

Identity documentation was common practice for colonial governments in Africa, first launched by Dutch settlers in the Cape Colony in the 1700s to regulate the supply of labor [Longman 2002: 347]. As Timothy Longman puts it, “The British and Belgians ruled most of their territories through a system known as ‘indirect rule’, in which indigenous leaders were left in place and used to administer colonial policies. Indirect rule, however, required both clearly defined ethnic groups and clearly defined indigenous

leaders, conditions that were frequently not in place. Hence, the colonial governments set about carefully defining regional boundaries and categorizing Africans by ethnicity, and where necessary they created both groups and ‘traditional’ leaders” [Longman 2002: 349].

However, in their political effort to define who belonged to one group or another, Europeans found a widely blended population, where mixed marriages and concubinage made it impossible to sort out subjects according to their beloved phenotypical criteria. Despite an unrealistic attempt to differentiate between taller and shorter sizes, or clearer and darker skin color, in the 1933–1934 census the invaders ended up sorting up people into two “ethnic groups” based on the number of cattle possessed by each family: those who owned more than ten animals were classified as ethnically Tutsi; people who possessed less than ten were listed as ethnically Hutu. That was the actual demarcating criteria to attribute ethnic identity: “Belgian colonial administrators so despaired of being able to distinguish Batutsi from Bahutu, that they introduced a means-tested system of ethnic identification. Any man with more than ten head of cattle was to be permanently classified as Tutsi, and any man with fewer than ten cattle as Hutu or Twa, depending on their profession” [Hintjens 1999: 253].

Civil rights and political privileges were delivered accordingly by the colonial administrations [Newbury 1987; De Waal 1994]. Suddenly, “to be Hutu in Belgian Ruanda-Urundi meant to be denied opportunities for education and employment, to completely lack political power, to pay heavy taxes, and to be kept in an economically marginalized position” [Longman 2002: 353]. This was built on the propagation of what Catharine Newbury called a “corporate vision of ethnic groups”: “Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa came to be viewed as internally homogeneous groups, and their members came to be treated in distinctive ways by the state. This made groups that had previously shown more internal flexibility appear more like biological groups” [Newbury 1998: 11].

CIVIL WAR: NEW CRISIS, OLD MASKS

The situation was symmetrically reversed after 1962 independence, with the progressive decolonization of the region. In early 1960, Belgian authorities oversaw the replacement of most Tutsi chiefs with Hutu and organized mid-year elections, which returned an overwhelming Hutu majority. In the new republic controlled by a Hutu ruling class, a period of unrestrainable violence began [Fabietti 2004: 169]. Tutsis started leaving the country to escape the Hutu purges, settling in the four neighboring countries: Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zaire.

It is noteworthy that the new scenario did not bring about the abolition of the ethnic distinctions as defined by the colonizers. When a group of activists issued a “Hutu Manifesto” just before independence, in 1957, their demands for equality of all Rwandans still adopted the racialist terminology [Newbury 1998: 12]. The Manifesto recognized that “poor Tutsi shared many of the problems of poor Hutu” and included the Twa in its demands for human rights, but still “defended the need for racial markers on identity cards and asked that these be retained after independence as a protective measure.” “Gradually, the Bahutu elite came to regard itself as the only authentic

indigenous leadership of Rwanda, and the Bahutu as the only true “sons of the soil”. Curiously, this claim of historical legitimacy ignored the prior claims of the minority Batwa, almost certainly the earliest inhabitants of the Great Lakes area” [Hintjens 1999: 264–254].

Despite President Habyarimana’s regime’s trying to dampen ethnic tensions, a deep state crisis brought the country to the 1990s violence. When another crisis of governance resulted in a struggle over who would control the state, “contenders for power tried to mobilize their constituencies using an appeal to solidarity based this time, as in 1959, on ethnic identity,” although no methodical class violence occurred this time [Newbury 1998: 17–18]. Newbury also notes: “Tutsi were discriminated against in education and access to government jobs; but before October 1990, systematic harassment of Tutsi was not characteristic of the Habyarimana regime. At that time, Tutsi did not face exclusion from private sector employment or local-level positions in the teaching, agriculture, or medical fields” [Newbury 1998: 15].

At the social-economic level, however, scholars observed that by the 1990s Rwanda state was in terrible shape, primarily due to the pressure of the global financial institutions dominated by the Western states: “In June 1990, the government finally yielded to World Bank/IMF pressure to implement a package of structural adjustment measures. Rwanda’s national currency was immediately devalued by two-thirds. There was also famine in the south of the country. [...] health services could not be maintained and maternal and infant mortality levels rose sharply [...] there was a dramatic increase in malaria, combined with severe food shortages and an influx of refugees from Burundi. [...] The army increased in size from 7,000 troops in 1989 to more than 30,000 by 1994 [...] French military assistance worsened levels of corruption and encouraged further purchases of military hardware at the expense of many basic necessities” [Hintjens 1999: 257].

Faced with a deep political crisis, the ruling class mobilized the old ethnic discourse, fostering hatred and fear “to divert attention from unresolved contradictions in the country’s political economy,” thus overlooking “questions of power and class” [Newbury 1998: 19]. Propagandistic tales and narratives were spread to polarize public opinion around the myth of an upcoming recolonization: “It was believed that the Tutsi elite were about to [...] conquer and subjugate the indigenous [...] innocent Bahutu. This recolonization would mean the restoration of slavery, and a return to the unquestionable superiority of the Batutsi overlords over the Bahutu majority; in short, a return to the pre-revolutionary past” [Hintjens 1999: 264].

The conflictual narrative around primordial ethnic groups, races, or tribes, as implemented by the colonial policies, became the 1990s “thinkability horizon” provided to desperate citizens to deal with a deep-rooted political crisis of state legitimacy in Rwanda. Then, an unjust, exacerbated socioeconomic difference, “recast by the colonial administration as a racialized estate order [...] culminated in the Rwandan Genocide” [Kamusella 2021: 15].

Moving then back to our wider theoretical point and considering how those groups, their status, and their meanings have been engineered under a political agenda, we keep on asking, endorsing Kamusella: “is a social group the same as an ethnic group? Should

these designations be applied on the basis of research and in light of scholarly definitions?" [Kamusella 2021: 2].

ETHNIC DISCOURSE: POLITICAL AGENDAS AND SCHISMOGENESIS

The historical Rwandan case provides a significant endorsement for the thesis advanced by Barth, Amselle, and M'Bokolo, exhibiting the fictional, discursive, and political nature of ethnic demarcations. Here, an ethnic discourse manipulates cultural traits, ascribing homogeneity by defining and circumscribing an ethnicity or by opposition to another group.

Besides historical colonialist and imperialist top-down impositions, current uses of ethnic ascriptions also have to be taken into serious consideration: "We need an account of ethnicity that explores its modernity. [...] Tamils, Serbs, Sikhs, Malaysians, Basques, and others are all very large groups, are all claimants to nationhood, and are all involved in violent confrontations with existing state structures and other large-scale ethnic groupings. This matrix of large size, nationalist aspiration, and violence characterizes these new ethnicities" [Appadurai 1996: 139].

Since there are no objective criteria to establish an "ethnicity," rather than asking ourselves "what is ethnic identity?", we shall better ask "who is using ethnic assignments, in which context, and for what purposes?" As there is no ethnicity out of the ethnic discourse, just as there are no facts out of a narration exposing them, we have to consider that the common history of a people is written and rewritten starting from a transient, situational "us."

Consider, for instance, actual Moroccan borders and the people living within them: we can easily see how the Moroccan government, the Berbers, the Sahrawis, the Polisario front, or the Arab-Yemeni nomads could be willing to write the same story or five different ethnic stories (if not more). Human relations live in a flow that institutional ethnic discourses try to freeze, photograph, and establish through symbolic language. Thus, ethnicity is also to be identified with the words of the subjects who contextually pronounce an essentialism, a "we are" against a "they are," with particular purposes and reasons emotionally wrapped around the in-group/out-group distinction.

The creation of an imagined community is a process very well outlined by Benedict Anderson [Anderson 1991], who showed how nationalisms invest so much effort in the creation and maintenance of imagined communities, deeply enforced by the media for people to perceive themselves as part of a specific group, often according to the interests and the agenda of other groups. It is the ideological, spreading model of the ethno-states. We can then see how problematic is the definition associated with the principle of "Self-determination of peoples," which opens a path for the legitimation and the independence of a local in-group that wishes to emancipate itself from the domination of an out-group, as long as this is manifested under an ethnic outfit and with national state perspectives: the ethno-state.

The most relevant works collected by Amselle and M'Bokolo in 1985 raised a reasonable doubt: were African ethnic boundaries and labels anywhere there before the European invasion? The researchers argued: "There was nothing resembling an

‘ethnicity’ during the pre-colonial period. Ethnicities derive from the action of the colonizer who, in his desire to territorialize the African continent, carved out ethnic entities that were subsequently claimed by the populations. From this perspective, ‘ethnicity,’ like numerous other supposedly primitive institutions, would only represent a further false archaism. But if before colonization there were no ethnic groups, what could we find there? In which frameworks were the social actors organized?” [Amselle, M’Bokolo 1985: 23].

And even more interestingly, the researchers showed that even when the colonizers’ ethnic charting actually corresponded to an existing set of local divisions and group belongings, those names, distinctions, and communities did not have the same local meanings European colonizers were assigning to them in their surveys. We therefore acknowledge that even where some labels had already been employed to describe families and populations, groups and belongings, their social use, meanings, and function were significantly different: “Undoubtedly, we can note a continuity in the use of some categories in the pre-colonial era and in the current one and note a resumption by the colonizer of terms that were already used before his arrival (“Peul”, “Bambara”, “Dioula”, and so on) but this simply highlights the fact that the ethnonym is a “floating signifier” and that its use is of a “performative” nature so that contrasting a specific meaning of an ethnonym with another does not make much sense, until the complete list of social uses of the same term is established” [Amselle, M’Bokolo: 37].

By claiming that ethnic borders can be (and have been) invented, we are not suggesting that ethnicity does not exist. Instead, we shall revive the hermeneutical perspective according to which ethnicity corresponds to an identity narrative for community belonging and/or political planning. As lovely outlined by Yelvington, “ethnicity is a social identity characterized by fictive kinship” [Yelvington 1991: 168].

And once we bring about the concept of kinship, we can only indicate the most remarkable work of Marshall Sahlins, exploring the social dynamics at the very heart of kinship bonds [Sahlins 2013]. Ethnicity is not an empirical fact in the sense of classic scientific realism, meaning it can not be objectively observed, measured, tested, etc. Still, it is real in a sense that goes well beyond such materialism: it is a feeling of belonging that is conceived, performed, negotiated, discussed, organized, and taught. Discourse does not limit itself to narratively reflecting an already given reality: it is a process that forms objects of knowledge and determines interpersonal configurations. Ethnicity is then better framed as a practice, socially established according to historical situations and personal feelings of belonging. It is a performative act, a *habitus* in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu [Bourdieu 1977]. It is a fact, not a thing.

Finally, beside the top-down scenario of imposed group divisions, a recent proposal by Graeber and Wengrow [Graeber and Wengrow 2021] could provide a groundwork for the sketching of a general model able to account for the way human beings and communities spontaneously create bonds and belongings with their similars, defining bounds and limits for that familiarity.

Schismogenesis is an anthropological term that describes the formation of social divisions and differentiation through progressive interaction between people. From the Greek words σχίσμα (skhisma) and γένεσις (genesis) “generation, creation,” it literally

means “creation of division.” As early as the mid-1930s, anthropologist Gregory Bateson studied some cases of behavioral differentiation among the Iatmul people of the Sepik River, in New Guinea, and introduced this term to account for the outcomes that may follow from contacts between people of different communities [Bateson 1935; Bateson 1936].

The dynamics identified as *schismogenesis* account for both interpersonal patterns, such as the assertive/submissive or the exhibitionism/admiration complementary differentiation, and for wider group relations, such as market competition, international diplomacy, and community rivalries.

Symmetrical, complementary, and reciprocal differentiation of behavioral patterns are further described by the author. Most relevantly here, it is important to highlight that fearing the latently disruptive potential of a conflictual escalation in the case of an exaggerated complementary differentiation, Bateson stressed the importance of existing social institutions able to mitigate the progressive divisions that can potentially lead to open confrontation. Conflict may be reduced by narrowing asymmetries between the groups.

Proposing an expansion of Bateson’s theory, Graeber and Wengrow suggested that the concept of *schismogenesis* could be used to describe the emergence of differences between societies more broadly, as human groups define themselves against their neighbors according to the in-group/out-group distinction. Following their lead and integrating the analysis of Bateson and Barth on the production of ethnic divisions, the concept of *ethnogenesis* may well serve to describe the creation of such social borders, groups, and frontiers under the policies of the otherness organized around ethnic narrative, bridging classical functional approaches, contemporary discourse, and postcolonial studies.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that the concept of ethnicity, defined as the feeling of belonging to a culturally isolated group, linguistically and territorially determined in a rigid and defined manner, neglected to consider all evidence that such stable groups have virtually never existed, as “all nation-states historically involve the amalgamation of many identities” [Appadurai 1996: 156].

All human cohorts, their habits, cultures, and languages are the fruit of a more or less slow process of interaction with others. Identity borders depend on the contrast and engagement with some kind of otherness, together with the power relations involved. With a closer look at the history of the Rwandan Genocide, we have seen how the ethnic identities of Hutu and Tutsi have been socially engineered to serve political agendas under the domination model of the *divide et impera*.

Following Fredrik Barth, we showed that ethnic identity is to be considered as an organizational tool defined by its boundaries, not by its content, and that such metaphorical barriers, just like all others, can shift. We saw under what logic those identity borders may be created and that the presence of frontiers—areas of passage and porosity between identities—does not call into question their existence. Liminality cases

of double membership or cultural crossings do not dissolve ethnic bounds, even when they integrate their performative elements. Finally, we reflected on the practices and forces that create such ethnic groups, a process we defined as *ethnogenesis*, in order to stress its status as a generated, dynamic, cultural product sustained by an ethnic narrative.

We did so in the belief that dismantling essentialism and showing the relative nature of social constructions is a crucial tool to prevent ethnicism and culturalism as disguised modes of racism and, more widely, as means of social discrimination, fuel for conflict in the name of the ethno-states: “The ethnic violence we see in many places is part of a wider transformation that is suggested by the term culturalism. Culturalism [...] is the conscious mobilization of cultural differences in the service of a larger national or transnational politics” [Appadurai 1996 :15].

As seen here with Rwanda, mass media and news agencies often describe civil wars around the world under the hypocritical label of “ethnic conflicts.” Such essentialism, we argue, prevents investigations from searching for the real political and economic reasons behind such conflicts, from social inequality to geopolitical interests, from predatory modes of production to corporate military-industrial complex programs and labor exploitation projects, hungry for disenfranchised prey.

We therefore infer that understanding “ethnic” tensions demands translating them into the forms of social inequality they originate from, disguised under the ethnic discourse.

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Научная статья

ЭТНОГЕНЕЗ И ВОЙНА В РУАНДЕ. ПОЛИТИКА ИНАКОВОСТИ

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Аннотация. Долгое время антропологический анализ основывался на предпосылке, что культурные границы имеют в каком-то смысле линейный характер и основаны на связях между людьми, которые разделяют общую культуру, но при этом имеют уникальные особенности, отличающие их от других групп. Такие границы идентичности могли находить прямое отражение в геополитических границах. Эта точка зрения легла в основу широко распространенного общественного дискурса, транслирующего упрощенные представления о том, как географические границы и социальная изоляция групп являются основными факторами, определяющими культурное разнообразие и сходство между народами. Социальные антропологи, в свою очередь, косвенно поддержали такую точку зрения, приняв весьма расплывчатое определение понятия «общество». Работы Фредрика Барта, наряду с другими важными исследованиями, открыли новую главу в этнографии, ознаменовав отход от антропологических представлений о культурах как об изолированных сущностях и этничности как о первостепенной связи. С тех пор анализ категориальных этнических различий базировался уже не на отсутствии мобильности, контактов или взаимодействия, а на постоянных переговорах между сообществами как ключевом факторе, структурирующем границы идентичности. Африканистика постколониального периода предоставила бесценный материал для изучения социальной онтологии этничности, которая здесь анализируется с особым акцентом на Руанду. Подобные аналитические инструменты, интегрированные в данной работе с постструктуралистской теорией дискурса, по-прежнему имеют решающее значение для предотвращения эссенциализма, расизма, идей этнического и культурного превосходства как средств социальной дискриминации в контексте этногосударств.

Ключевые слова: культурализм, эпистемология, этничность, Фредрик Барт, социальная антропология, Руанда, раса

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THE SOVEREIGNTY FACTOR IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AFRICAN UNION'S POLICY ON INTEGRATIVE BORDER GOVERNANCE

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Abstract. This article examines the African Union's (AU) strategies for strengthening the sovereignty of African states—a core driver of the region's political development—within the framework of its cross-border policy. The study centers on the potential of African state sovereignty and how it evolves under AU initiatives, with a focus on the AU's regional policy of integrated border management. The aim is to evaluate how the AU's integrated border management policy shapes the sovereign development of African states. The analysis draws on theoretical approaches to political borders as tools for sovereign state development. Since decolonization, state border policies have reflected political maturity and ideological orientation—spanning neoliberal, Marxist, and postmodern traditions. The meaning of political borders in Africa is tied not only to the capacities of sovereign states but also to the interplay between pan-Africanism and state nationalism. A key insight of the research is the significance of cross-border management challenges. The concept of transborderness poses critical questions about the relationship between state sovereignty and regionalism in intra-African relations. Against the backdrop of Africa's growing agency and the “African solutions to African problems” principle, states across the continent grapple with defining their political identity while working to foster inclusive political practices. AU initiatives to regulate borders and address postcolonial legacies affecting sovereignty serve as a crucial mechanism for building an integrated political space in Africa.

Keywords: regionalism, sovereignty, pan-Africanism, “weak state”, cross-border, *uti possidetis juris*, Niamey Convention

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of political borders in Africa touches upon a wide range of problems related to international cooperation among states of the region. This issue is connected with the need to study the factors that influence sovereignty development and with the

search for sustainable formats for international interaction in Africa, both in the areas of security and development. For Africa, which is seeking resources to expand its subjectivity and agency [Degterev 2024: 59], the solution of this issue hinges on the contradiction between the theoretical/normative definition of sovereignty and the practical model of sovereignty of African states.

In this context, the African Union (AU) highlights border management as an important priority for the continent. Adopted in 2007, the African Union Border Programme (AUBP) outlined the tasks of cross-border management—ranging from security issues and counterterrorism to measures to regulate migration policy¹. Important regulatory documents included the 2014 Niamey Convention² on Cross-Border Cooperation and the 2020 Strategy for a Better Integrated Border Governance³. The AU's cross-border development vector is also enshrined in Agenda 2063. Key projects of the Agenda—from the creation of a high-speed rail network to the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area and the introduction of a visa-free regime—aim to strengthen the continent's cross-border connectivity⁴.

Studying the issue of border governance allows us to partially determine the influence of the pan-African model of regionalism on the legitimization of African states' political processes, both in the context of the normative entrenchment of classical *de jure* sovereignty and in terms of recognizing the “decentralized transborder influence” of local non-state actors.

This study focuses on the African Union's approaches to promoting sovereignty as a fundamental concept for the political development of countries in the region in the context of a broad understanding of African regionalism and its special role in shaping a multi-level, transboundary model of border management. The article takes as its theoretical starting point the issue of the sovereignty potential of African states and its development under the influence of the AU's pan-African initiatives. The aim of this paper is to determine the impact of the AU's integrated border management policy on the sovereign development of African states.

Methodologically, the study emphasizes theoretical approaches to understanding the potential of African states to ensure their sovereignty and political boundaries. The article examines selected approaches to studying the sovereignty of African states: from the classical interpretation of the “weak state” and acknowledging the role of political borders in perpetuating the Westphalian sovereignty model to a critical assessment of the modern state's role in ensuring the integrity of national borders. It also identifies the African Union's cross-border strategies as a decisive instrument for shaping the regional cooperation agenda and strengthening the sovereignty of African states.

¹ African Union Border Programme (AUBP). AU. 19.01.2025. <https://peaceau.org/en/page/85-au-borderprogramme-aubp> (accessed: 25.03.2025)

² African Union Convention on Cross-Border Cooperation (Niamey Convention). AU. 2014. <https://peaceau.org/uploads/au-niamey-convention-eng.pdf> (accessed: 25.03.2025)

³ African Union Strategy for a Better Integrated Border Governance. AU. 2020. <https://peaceau.org/uploads/2020-english-au-border-governance-strategy-final.pdf> (accessed: 25.03.2025)

⁴ Flagship Projects of Agenda 2063. AU. <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/flagship-projects> (accessed: 25.03.2025)

ON CERTAIN FEATURES OF THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE STATE AND THE BORDER PERIPHERY IN AFRICA

The modern African state faces a wide range of systemic problems. The intersection of these problems in the context of the political culture of African society, against the backdrop of the current level of development of state institutions and the high instability of political processes, gives rise to discussions about the nature of the sovereignty of African states [Loshkariov 2024b]. For the African state, neither the dominance over territory nor spatial boundaries have historically been the decisive factor in political development and influence. To a greater extent, the nature of domination was manifested through the regulation of multidimensional social interactions and the special social categorization of the state along lines of clan ties, army hierarchy, party-bureaucratic groups, local elites, etc.

In the late 1980s, the concept of the “weak state,” developed by American political scientist Joel S. Migdal, began to gain currency in Western expert circles. According to Migdal, a “weak state” is incapable of controlling society and reproducing or recreating the values that unite this society and the various social structures integrated within it. At the same time, Migdal challenged the ability of a “weak state” to fully realize its functions. Among the causes, Migdal identified the high degree of fragmentation of society, as well as governance methods often aimed more at the desire of political elites to remain in power than at ensuring societal development [Migdal 1988: 261].

According to this discourse, a “weak state” experiences destructive influence from internal and external political actors that erode its monopoly on sovereignty. In relation to the territorial influence of the state, this position can be defined as the inability of the state power to fully control the population and the territory of the state and as the state’s inability to ensure the interests of society as its legitimate representative [Feraru 2018: 103–104].

According to I.K. Hlovor (Ghana): “The problem facing African state builders is the difficulty in projecting state power and control to remote, sparsely populated, inhospitable regions...” and “...the limited capacity of the state means that it is forced to concentrate on areas of export production” [Hlovor 2020: 40]. Essentially, such a state abandons the population of border regions to their fate and protects exclusively its own interests. Strategic disregard for borders appears to be a characteristic feature of a “weak state” and gives rise to complex processes in the borderlands/periphery.

In this context, the border periphery of African states is experiencing the influence of a wide range of destabilizing factors, such as marginalization of border territories, the increasing permeability of international borders to illegal and criminal activities, the intensification of border and territorial conflicts, the growth of migration flows against the backdrop of the socio-economic insecurity of the population [Obah-Akpowoghaha, Ojatorotu, Tarro 2020: 91–92], and others.

Thus, ensuring security and development for all citizens of the state, particularly those living in border areas, is becoming a systemic problem for a number of African states. The integrity of state sovereignty and borders is becoming the subject of both normative and military-political engagement of regional and external actors. In this context, recent events in the Sahel, related to the signing of the Liptako-Gourma Charter by three states in the region and the proclamation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), are also of interest. Analyzing the initial steps and nature of the AES, I.D. Loshkarev

outlines a new discourse in interpreting the prospects for the development of sovereignty of African states [Loshkariov 2024a]. He highlights the unilateral model of cooperation in the Sahel as a promising mechanism for developing sovereignty and overcoming the limitations of a “weak state.”

AFRICAN BORDERS AND THE WESTPHALIAN SOVEREIGNTY FORMULA

The problem of political borders in African countries is directly linked to the definition and condition of state sovereignty. Researchers of contemporary sovereignty in Africa note a certain separation between statehood and its specific territorial manifestation [Loshkariov 2024b: 40].

The Westphalian vector of developing sovereignty through the consolidation of territoriality and the fixation of borders turned out to be poorly compatible with the traditional ideas of Africans about the organization and functions of borders dividing the territories of various peoples [Okumu 2010: 4–5]. In pre-colonial Africa, tribal boundaries were not static. They existed as social constructs and zones through which human and intercommunal relations were regulated. Typically, boundaries were shaped by “cultural reciprocity practices,” or the right to use others’ lands according to need. Borders were conceptualized as zones of contact between cultural and political groups for shared residence, or as buffer zones not under the authority of any one community, or as enclaves for migrating communities.

According to Nigerian researcher Professor L. Amusan, “before the Berlin Conference, Africa’s boundary system relied on three systems of frontier of contact (where people of distinct political and cultural uniformity lived together) ...The second type is the frontier of separation. This is when peoples of different culture and political system are separated with natural obstacles... Lastly is a group of people that were separated by people of enclave. These are nomadic people such as the Tourages, Somalis, Fulanis, and Massai...” [Amusan 2018: 6521]. In the pre-colonial period, the border did not serve as an instrument for shaping the territorial basis of political authority and sovereignty.

During the colonial period of African development, borders were drawn “by Europeans for Europeans” [Griffiths 1986: 205]. The colonial period consolidated the Westphalian concept of a territorial sovereign state in Africa. During this period, borders were viewed as a means of administration, a means of delimiting spheres of influence, and a means of “civilization.” Political borders in Africa were defined primarily between 1884 and 1904, and the final division of Africa was completed in 1920. According to E.I. Asiwaju, a professor of history at the University of Lagos, in Africa, there are 109 international borders that separate 177 cultural or ethnic groups [Asiwaju 1985].

Paradoxically, during decolonization, the *de jure* political border becomes a symbol of independence, a symbol of the international legal sovereignty of African states, and the international legal system supports this paradox [Herbst 1997: 120–123; Matshanda 2016: 471]. The Montevideo Convention (1933) establishes four criteria of state sovereignty: a permanent population; a defined territory; a government; and the capacity to enter into relations with the other states.⁵ The presence of a border is recognized as a stable attribute of a state capable of exercising its sovereignty.

⁵ Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States. 26.12.1933. *LichtlanD*. https://www.lichtland.org/docs/Konvention_von_Montevideo_1933.pdf (accessed: 21.03.2025)

According to Canadian researcher Lee J.M. Seymour, “Africa’s postcolonial borders have proved remarkably resilient in the decades since independence.” [Seymour 2013: 17–18]. The borders remain virtually unchanged, despite the general recognition of the negative effects of the colonial division of territories, such as the existence of divided peoples, the destruction of natural habitats of African ethnic groups, the growth of illegal migration, and the entrenchment of conflictual patterns of interaction between border communities [Kassae Nygusie, Ivkina 2020: 25–26; Asiwaju 1985; Griffiths 1996].

This is directly related to the strategies of national liberation movements aimed at building African political nations and protecting African uniqueness through the development of territorial nationalism or the nation-state [Amusan 2018: 63–65]. Borders have established the potential for sovereignty and the ability of African states to be “visible” on the international stage, and only within these borders are the “weak states” of Africa able to realize their subjectivity [Jackson, Rosberg 1982: 13, 17]. These approaches are derived from discussions about the nature of the sovereignty of African states, as well as the nature of “territorial nationalism” [Bondarenko 2022: 63–64].

Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba noted that a colossal problem facing Africa on its path to development is the weak expression of a national idea and, as a consequence, the ethnicization of political processes in the continent’s countries: “These divisions, which the colonial powers have always exploited the better to dominate us, have played an important role—and are still playing that role—in the suicide of Africa”⁶. Lumumba was a consistent supporter of African nationalism, viewing it not only as a tool for combating colonialism and a means of building an independent Africa but also as a crucial resource for the political unification of Africans and the overcoming of ethnic and other social contradictions within nation-states.

In studying the nature of the modern nation-state in Africa, it is impossible to ignore the interplay between the ideas of Pan-Africanism and territorial nationalism. The question of the ultimate goal of decolonization in Africa was not straightforward for contemporaries and was closely intertwined with the understanding of the potential of the African state. Thus, Ghanaian leader K. Nkrumah believed that the nation-state was an inevitable stage on the path to pan-African unity for the continent. The state must evolve from full sovereignty to the status of a state within a single African Federation or Continental Union, since as sovereign players outside of pan-African unity, African states, under the conditions of systemic neocolonialism, would become politically dependent, economically vulnerable, and perpetually backward [Nkrumah 1963].

Tanzanian leader J. Nyerere, unlike K. Nkrumah, recognized the intrinsic value of the nation-state in the fight against neocolonialism, since it is through strengthening the sovereignty and self-reliance of the state that genuine unity and gradual integration through regional mechanisms can be achieved, whereas territorial nationalism (state nationalism) represents a form of “tribalism on a state scale” that hinders African unity⁷.

This approach to understanding the role of territorial nationalism was aimed at building a distinctive African statehood and, as Ivor Chipkin, a researcher of the development of political identity and nationalism in South Africa, observed, “nation-building presupposed the formation of an independent political community” [Kohnert

⁶ Debating Nationalism in Africa. *AfSol*. 13.05.2016. <https://afsolblog.wordpress.com/2016/05/13/debatingnationalism-in-africa/> (accessed: 25.03.2025)

⁷ Shivji I.G. Pan-Africanism in Mwalimu Nyerere’s thought. *Third World Resurgence*. 2009. № 227. Pp. 25–29. <https://twn.my/title2/resurgence/2009/227/world1.htm> (accessed: 25.03.2025)

2009: 112–113; Robinson 2014: 709–711]. Moreover, the effectiveness of state sovereignty was directly related to the idea of territorial nationalism, as well as to the state's ability to maintain its presence and control within former colonial borders. This was generally consistent with the sovereignty of the modern state, since sovereignty, in its basic features, presupposes precisely the “supremacy of state power within its territory” [Okoli 2024: 120].

Discussing the methods of consolidating colonial borders during the wave of decolonization, Nigerian researcher L. Amusan points out that border demarcation was often used by central governments to suppress minorities. “the principle of majority rule and democratisation that blew across the continent of Africa further entrenched instability as the minorities were side-tracked in governance.” [Amusan 2018: 6522].

Researchers frequently note that liberal expectations of democratization in African society have encountered irreconcilable contradictions at the level of the value-driven organization of the political process in Africa, mainly due to the lack of a democratic political culture among the general public [Bondarenko 2022: 65–69]. The failures and partial inconsistency of democratization strategies for African countries have weakened the sovereignty of most sub-Saharan African states [Emelyanov 2015: 109], which, in turn, has led to the degradation of political boundaries, primarily due to the increasing role of tribalism and the ethnicization of the political process.

RETHINKING THE POTENTIAL OF AFRICAN BORDERS

The widespread understanding of African borders as the most “porous and permeable” in the world inevitably leads researchers to question the need to strengthen the influence of central authorities at borders in order to advance state interests and consolidate territorial sovereignty. It is also noted that African states, as a rule, are unable to fully control their border territories and are even interested in “border porosity” to reduce the intensity of interstate conflicts [Hlovor 2020: 44].

A postmodern perspective on the development of African borders assumes that, *firstly*, in order to strengthen the security of border territories and ensure the vital interests of the communities living there, it is necessary to consider the pre-colonial experience of regulating these territories, the specific living conditions of nomadic pastoral tribes, and the economic interests of local populations interested in active cross-border operations [Hlovor 2020: 38]. This approach necessitates an understanding of the security and governance of African borders in the spirit of Ken Booth’s theory of emancipation [Floyd, Croft 2011: 156–158, 163–165].

Research within the theory of emancipation focuses on issues of human security, prioritizing the interests of the population itself. From Ken Booth’s perspective, only the liberation of individuals from physical and human constraints (e.g., poverty and inequality, etc.) leads to genuine security. States are meant to serve as instruments, not the ultimate goal, of security. Yet, they often disregard emancipatory objectives in pursuit of their own interests, substituting the concept of security with their own agendas. In the era of the “broad understanding of security,” sovereignty, according to Ken Booth, loses its traditional significance—and some governments themselves become sources of threats to their own citizens [Booth 1991].

In this vein, studying border security in African countries is associated not so much with understanding the role of state institutions as with examining the role of local

authorities and communities in these processes. An analysis of the state of border areas by the Sahel and West Africa Club (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD) in the context of population security shows that violence is more likely to occur in border areas, where there are 67% more incidents of violence than in other areas⁸. Communities living in border areas are interested in border management for their own security and economic interests, rather than for the sake of sovereignty and the dominance of the “center” over the border periphery. Various non-state actors are willing to assume responsibility for cross-border security in the country’s peripheral areas. [Hlovor 2020].

Secondly, postmodern scholars propose a model of transregional, or transborder, governance as an important alternative to strengthening state borders within the framework of classical sovereignty theory. Within this framework, they propose to stop treating the “porosity of borders” of African states as a problem hindering the growth of sovereignty. It is more important to harness the potential of border permeability to develop effective formats for subregional interaction. Yuichi Sasaoka, a professor at Meiji University, in his work “New Perspectives on the African State Borders,” argues that, despite the African Union’s reaffirmation of its commitment to state sovereignty and recognition of colonial borders in 2002, the AU is currently seeking to implement a model of multi-level border governance that takes into account the interests of states, local communities, and all cross-border stakeholders [Sasaoka 2022: 3]. According to Sasaoka, “The pre-modern state vacuum in Africa should be used to create a postmodern sub-regional society” [Sasaoka 2022: 2].

At the same time, it should be noted that, amid the permanent crisis of African statehood, scholars are increasingly drawn to the potential of border zones (borderlands) as an instrument for shaping and defining power-based relations. According to F. Söderbaum and J. Taylor, the emergence of specific microregions in borderlands reflects the transformation of the state’s role as a key structure in the economic and political organization of society [Söderbaum, Taylor 2008: 13]. These microregions exist at the intersection of the national and local levels, often perceived as a single entity. The development process on the part of local communities is rooted in traditional cross-border development, characterized by weak state control over these territories due to the natural landscape and the economic practices of the local population. As German scholars T. Hüsken and G. Klute note, “political realities on the periphery and borderlands of many postcolonial African states appear to challenge state concepts of sovereignty, territoriality, and citizenship” [Hüsken, Klute 2010: 109].

BORDERS IN THE CONTEXT OF AFRICAN REGIONALISM

It should be noted that, since the independence of African states, the issue of recognizing existing borders has become a pressing issue within the Pan-African movement. The legal settling of former colonial borders began in 1964, when the Organization of African Unity (OAU), at the first ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government meeting in Cairo (United Arab Republic), adopted Resolution 16 (I)⁹. The resolution affirmed the principle of the inviolability of borders on

⁸ Security, borders and development. *OECD*. <https://oecd.org/en/topics/security-borders-and-development.html> (accessed: 12.02.2025)

⁹ Resolutions adopted by the first ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government held in

the African continent as they existed after the independence of African countries. Since that time, the OAU, and subsequently the AU, have closely linked the existence of manageable and secure borders with the stability and legitimacy of the sovereignty of African states.

Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Prime Minister of Nigeria (1960–1966), noted the importance of “respect for existing boundaries which must, in the interest of peace in Africa, remain the recognized boundaries until such a time as the peoples concerned decide of their own free will to merge into one unit or redraw boundaries”¹⁰ [Esidene, Onyebuchi 2012]. In 1963, when the OAU was established, the position of the African countries participating in the Monrovia Group [Kassae Nygusie, Ivkina 2020: 32–34]¹¹ on border regulation prevailed. They defended the position that the map of Africa, based on the doctrine of *uti possidetis juris*¹², should be respected, since redrawing the map based on racial, religious, psychological, and linguistic criteria could lead to the erasure of a number of states on the continent [Amusan 2018: 6522]. Following the OAU, since its establishment in 2002, the AU has recognized the colonial borders of states in the region based on the same legal principle.

Since its inception, the African Union has not only served as a leading regional guarantor of the border integrity of African states. Relying on the international normative context, the African Union also promotes the pan-African concept of regionalism within its cooperation, primarily based on the organization’s Constitutive Act¹³. For example, Article 4 of the document, along with the fundamental principles of peaceful co-existence (Article 4i), non-interference in the internal affairs of other states (Article 4g), and the peaceful resolution of conflicts (Article 4e), among others, includes a principle outlining the special potential of regionalism. Article 4h 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, namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.”¹⁴

In the context of the “responsibility to protect” principle (R2P)¹⁵ [Adu, Bokeria, Degterev et al. 2023: 424–425], relying on this article of the Constitutive Act, the African Union gains the ability to collectively intervene in the affairs of sovereign actors. It also

Cairo, UAR, from 17 to 21 July 1964. 1964. *AU*. https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/9514-1964_ahg_res_1-24_i_e.pdf (accessed: 12.02.2025)

¹⁰ Ashiru O., Olufemi G. Nigeria and the Organisation of African Unity/ African Union: fifty years journey: an article in commemoration of fifty years of the establishment of the continental organization. *The Nigerian Voice*. 24.05.2013. <https://www.thenigerianvoice.com/news/114515/nigeria-and-the-organisation-of-african-unity-african-union.html> (accessed: 25.02.2025)

¹¹ The Monrovia Group, in contrast with the more progressive Casablanca Group, demonstrated a more moderate approach not only to the issue of delimiting African states’ borders but also to broader questions of Africa’s international development in the post-decolonization era. The Monrovia Group’s primary objective was for African states to attain international sovereignty as a balancing instrument—both in relations among former colonies themselves and in their interactions with former colonial powers. International legal recognition emerged as one of the key resources for legitimizing the nascent African sovereign states.

¹² Within the doctrine of *uti possidetis juris* (the general law of state succession), a successor state fully recognizes as its own territory the lands inherited from the colonial period—within the exact boundaries it received from the former colonial power.

¹³ Constitutive Act of the African Union. Article 4 (h). *AU*. https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/34873-fileconstitutiveact_en.pdf (accessed: 25.03.2025)

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ The concept of the “responsibility to protect” (R2P) was included in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document and enshrined in Security Council Resolution 1674. 2006. *UN*. <https://refworld.org/ru/legal/resolution/unsc/2006/ru/31964> (accessed: 25.03.2025)

gains the ability to regulate the vast, poorly controlled border territories of African states. This approach by the African Union is implemented through joint peacekeeping operations with the UN or regional African organizations (e.g., ECOWAS)¹⁶ [Bokeria, Degterev 2024].

Through international cooperation in implementing peacekeeping missions, as well as through the hybrid nature of its operations, the AU is strengthening its influence on the continent. Moreover, according to Russian researcher A.V. Khudaikulova, the UN currently increasingly requires active partnership with the AU and other African regional structures in the field of peacekeeping. [Khudaykulova 2023: 355] This normatively strengthens the AU's position in matters of ensuring the stability of its member states' sovereign borders. In terms of funding and support for peacekeeping operations, the AU is directly dependent on its international partners and “still has a long way to go before becoming a self-sufficient actor in the field of peacekeeping” [Yutyayeva 2021: 201]. However, in terms of legitimizing its influence on sovereign actors through peacekeeping, the African Union has significantly strengthened both its political/normative and “coercive” position on the continent. The regional security agenda inevitably remains one of the fundamental components of the African model of regionalism, encompassing the principles, goals, and strategies of regional cooperation that define the inclusive regional parameters of Africa's development as a subject of global interaction.

At the same time, in the context of the pan-African development agenda, the African Union is reaching strategic heights in global competition, not only pursuing the “hard power” objectives of ensuring regional security but also steadily advancing its own integration strategies that define the economic foundation of African regionalism. Here, first and foremost, the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) should be discussed. However, while recognizing the pan-African FTA as the largest and most promising in the world, experts note the exceptional complexity of implementing this cooperation, manifested in the development contradictions between various African regions, the lack of necessary infrastructure and investment deficits, the imbalances in internal and external trade flows, and other issues¹⁷. Among the obvious challenges to advancing the AfCFTA is the problem of unsettled African borders.

In the context where only 35% of Africa's 170 000 km of borders have been demarcated¹⁸, the African Union, in collaboration with regional organizations, is developing mechanisms to foster the development of borderland areas and to strengthen the border management systems of African states. This AU practice reflects a significant contradiction in the political development of African countries—namely, the tension between two competing imperatives. On the one hand, there is the core vector of regional cooperation among African states, which emphasizes the recognition of sovereignty's integrity and the consolidation of its territorial foundations [Feraru 2018: 107–108]. On the other hand, there is the inevitable need to embrace a cross-border model of border

¹⁶ For example, at the end of 2012, the AU and ECOWAS initiated the International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA).

¹⁷ Morozenskaya E. V. The African Continental Free Trade Area: Is It the First Step Toward Establishing the African Economic Community? *Institute for African Studies*. (In Russ.). <https://inafran.ru/node/1698> (accessed: 01.02.2025)

¹⁸ African Union Strategy for a Better Integrated Border Governance. 2020. *AU*. P. 7. <https://peaceau.org/uploads/2020-english-au-border-governance-strategy-final.pdf> (accessed: 01.02.2025)

governance rooted in African regionalism—a model that, to some extent, erodes the concept of territorial nationalism.

CROSS-BORDER DIMENSIONS IN AU POLICY AND INTEGRATED BORDER GOVERNANCE

The African Union, as the leading regional organization, seeks to structure continental relations on the premise that states bear primary responsibility for protecting their populations and territories and ensuring the security of their borders. Simultaneously, the AU aims to foster an “integrated continent, politically united on the basis of the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa’s Renaissance”¹⁹. The AU’s approach is not merely rooted in the preservation of Pan-African identity within international engagement; it is also geared towards establishing an “world class integrative infrastructure that criss-crosses the continent” and a “continent of seamless borders and management of cross-border resources through dialogue”²⁰.

Cross-border connectivity constitutes a defining feature of African political consciousness, an integral element of the continent’s historical experience, and a fundamental aspect of everyday life for its peoples. This reality is inherently supported by the African Union, particularly in the domains of border governance, sovereignty stabilization, and the development of normative frameworks for border management amid the growing prominence of cross-border regionalism.

As E. Asiwaju has observed, Africa demonstrates a clear potential for cross-border development of peripheral zones and cross-border border management practices [Asiwaju 1999: 28]. Through his examination of transboundary communities in Nigeria, the scholar emphasized the necessity of addressing African border challenges via integrative development grounded in cross-border regionalism—an approach consistent with the principles of both the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and its successor, the African Union (AU)²¹. Asiwaju identifies several key factors of cross-border regionalism in Africa, including the phenomenon of cross-border peoples, the all-encompassing nature of cross-border trade, transboundary natural resources (such as the so-called “rivers of unity”—the Nile, the Niger, the Senegal, and the Orange River)²², transboundary strategic resources, and historical cultural ties [Asiwaju 1999: 35–36].

The African Union has progressively integrated principles of cross-border cooperation into its strategy for managing state borderlands. From the 1964 Cairo Resolution on Border Disputes Between African States²³ to the 2020 Strategy for Better

¹⁹ Agenda 2063. Our Aspirations for the Africa We Want. AU. <https://au.int/agenda2063/aspirations> (accessed: 28.02.2025)

²⁰ African Union Strategy for a Better Integrated Border Governance. AU. 2020. P. 10. <https://peaceau.org/uploads/2020-english-au-border-governance-strategy-final.pdf> (accessed: 01.02.2025)

²¹ Professor Anthony Asiwaju’s Border that Unites and Anti-Nigeria Sentiments: Quo Vadis for Regional Integration? *ThisDay*. 29.12.2019. <https://thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/12/29/professor-anthony-asiwajusborder-that-unites-and-anti-nigeria-sentiments-quo-vadis-for-regional-integration/> (accessed: 12.02.2025)

²² This allows one to trace the development of quasi-regional integration groupings that manage transboundary rivers and water bodies, such as the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Mano River Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), and others.

²³ Resolutions adopted by the first ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government held in Cairo, UAR, from 17 to 21 July 1964. Organization of African Unity. AU. 1964. https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/9514-1964_ahg_res_1-24_i_e.pdf (accessed: 12.02.2025)

Management of African Borders²⁴, the AU and its predecessor, the OAU, have consistently upheld the principle of respect for African states' borders²⁵, the principle of resolving border disputes through negotiation²⁶, as well as a commitment to continue demarcation and delimitation as instruments of peace, security, and socio-economic progress²⁷.

The Strategy delineates the foundational principles of integrated border governance across the African continent. Upon examining the distinctive underpinnings of border governance, one observes the African Union's holistic approach, which intricately links governance, development, and security imperatives. The framework set forth in the Strategy reflects the AU's pronounced commitment to safeguarding the sovereignty of African states. As a result, the document underscores key objectives in the domains of security, cross-border cooperation, migration policy, and community involvement in the development of borderland regions²⁸. Notably, the Strategy also embodies the AU's intent to amplify regional potential by promoting a cross-border model of integrated border governance.

Within the framework of African Union activities, the development of a comprehensive (integrated) border governance model is rooted in wide-ranging regional initiatives designed to foster sustainable cross-border cooperation among African states, in keeping with the ethos of Pan-African collaboration. This strategic approach is operationalized through a diverse set of AU policy instruments, notably the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) (2002) and the Continental Early Warning System (2007); the AU Migration Policy Framework (2006) and the Common Position on Migration (2015), which together encompass the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons in Africa (2016) and the accompanying Action Plan (2018); the Policy Framework for Pastoralism in Africa (2011); the Integrated Maritime Strategy up to 2050 (2012); and the African Continental Free Trade Area (2021), among others²⁹.

It is evident that the aforementioned AU initiatives are aimed not only at fostering cross-border cooperation in Africa but also at establishing a sustainable model of integrated border governance, with borders themselves conceptualized as nodes that connect states in the implementation of a wide range of policies³⁰.

In January 2007, the African Union launched the African Union Border Program (AUBP), which was designed to provide a negotiating platform for continuous engagement among stakeholders on border-related issues across Africa. The program emphasized the need for proper border demarcation, the advancement of cross-border integration, and the effective management, control, and maintenance of border security³¹.

²⁴ African Union Strategy for a Better Integrated Border Governance. AU. 2020. P. 7. <https://peaceau.org/uploads/2020-english-au-border-governance-strategy-final.pdf> (accessed: 01.02.2025)

²⁵ The principle is enshrined in the OAU Charter, Resolution AHG/Res. 16(I) On Border Disputes Between African States (OAU, 1964), and Article 4(b) of the Constitutive Act (AU, 2002)

²⁶ CM/Res.1069 (XLIV): Resolution on peace and security in Africa through reservation by Somalia negotiated settlement of border conflicts. Council of Ministers. *Organization of African Unity*. 1986. https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/9604-27com_1986b.pdf (accessed: 15.11.2024)

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ African Union Strategy for a Better Integrated Border Governance. AU. 2020. Pp. 17–46. <https://peaceau.org/uploads/2020-english-au-border-governance-strategy-final.pdf> (accessed: 15.11.2024)

²⁹ Ibid. Pp. 13–14.

³⁰ Ibid. P. 13.

³¹ African Union Border Programme (AUBP). AU. 2007. <https://peaceau.org/en/page/85-au-border-programmeaubp> (accessed: 28.01.2025)

Since the Program's inception, the timelines for the demarcation and delimitation of interstate borders have been extended twice. Initially conceived as a 10-year initiative, the Program was revised in 2016, when a new implementation deadline of 2022 was set³². However, upon the expiration of that deadline, work under the Border Program has continued: for instance, the East African Community member states have established a new target date of 2027³³. Legal scholar Gbenga Oduntan, critiquing the Program's decade-long timelines, already noted in 2015 that realistic implementation periods should be projected over a 30-year horizon [Oduntan 2015: 115]. The Program's overarching strategic objective is to build secure and open borders, effecting a transition from borders conceived as barriers ("boundaries as barriers") to borders functioning as bridges ("boundaries as bridges"). Given its multifunctional nature, the Program engages partners both within Africa—including regional integration groups and individual states—and among external actors. Notably, from 2008 to June 2023, the Program received substantial funding through a partnership with the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), with the total budget over this period amounting to €71.4 million³⁴.

In collaboration with the East African Community, the African Union, through its Border Program, implemented a "Peace Caravan" project in Namanga, Kenya, in July 2023. The aim of the project was to inform local communities affected by unsettled borders about ongoing national, regional, and continental initiatives for the peaceful and sustainable resolution of conflicts³⁵.

In the context of the Border Program's implementation, the African Union's key approaches to cross-border governance, cooperation, and development were also systematized. Perhaps the most decisive document in this regard was the Niamey Convention on Cross-Border Cooperation (2014)³⁶.

The Convention, in its definition of transboundary cooperation, recognizes an important fact: the diversity of participants in cooperation, alongside central and regional government institutions. Cross-border cooperation is defined as "any act or policy aimed at promoting and strengthening good-neighbourly relations between border populations, territorial communities and administrations or other stakeholders within the jurisdiction of two or more States, including the conclusion of agreements and arrangements useful for this purpose."³⁷

According to the AU, the Niamey Convention aims to develop effective integrated border management with the goal of transforming border areas into catalysts for growth

³² Meeting of Ministers on African Border Issues concludes with the adoption of the Addis Ababa Declaration on AUBP. Press Release. AU. 07.10.2016. <https://peaceau.org/uploads/pr-aubp-meeting-of-ministers-3-to-5-oct2016.pdf> (accessed: 28.01.2025)

³³ Deadline on Africa's contested borders nears. *The EastAfrican*. 05.07.2023. <https://theeastafican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/deadline-on-africa-s-contested-borders-nears-4293724> (accessed: 28.01.2025)

³⁴ Border governance: Support to the African Union Border Programme (AUBP) Effective and sustainable border governance prevents conflicts between African states and promotes integration. *Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit*. 2023. <https://giz.de/en/downloads/giz2023-en-support-african-union-borderprogramme.pdf> (accessed: 25.03.2025)

³⁵ The Peace Caravan EAC project and comparative analysis for the border communities of Kenya, Uganda and South Sudan have been launched in Namanga, Kenya. *The East African Community*. 03.07.2023. <https://eac.int/press-releases/154-peace-security/2833-eac-peace-caravan-and-benchmarking-tour-for-bordercommunities-in-kenya,-uganda-and-south-sudan-launched-in-namanga,-kenya> (accessed: 20.02.2025)

³⁶ African Union Convention on Cross-Border Cooperation. (Niamey Convention). AU. 2014 <https://peaceau.org/uploads/au-niamey-convention-eng.pdf> (accessed: 20.02.2025)

³⁷ Ibid.

and socio-economic and political integration of the continent. The Convention establishes a legal basis for integrated management through the principle of subsidiarity and transboundary partnerships at all levels of border management: continental, regional, national, local, and community.

Despite the strategic importance of the Niamey Convention for advancing a pan-African vision for Africa's cross-border development, the document has not yet entered into force. As of July 2024, only 18 of the 55 countries have signed it, and only 11 have ratified the Convention³⁸. The document can only enter into force after the 15th instrument of ratification has been submitted to the AU Secretary General³⁹. The complexity of adopting the Convention reflects the difficult process of introducing transboundary policy into the daily practice of African states and the significant contradictions that the states themselves face within the framework of this policy [Obah-Akpowoghaha, Ojakorotu, Tarro 2020: 107–108].

Integrated border management, as a key area of activity for the African Union, can primarily be defined as a critical vector of regional cross-border policy. Its central objectives are to ensure the security of African borders, promote cross-border trade and integration, and improve living conditions for populations in borderland areas. This approach is designed to coordinate the efforts of multiple stakeholders—including national government agencies, local communities, and international partners—to achieve effective border control. Crucially, it aims to transform borders from mere lines of separation into instruments of development and bridges of cooperation among AU member states. Integrated border management consists of numerous AU strategies, programs, conventions, as well as cross-border projects and working platforms.

One current example is the Integrated Border Stability Mechanism (IBSM) in West Africa, launched in 2023 in the region jointly with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT). The initiative aims to strengthen cooperation in border management and security in regions that are strategically important for regional stability⁴⁰.

The effectiveness of the African Union's efforts to build integrated border management is directly linked to the partnership system the African Union seeks to establish. These partnerships primarily involve African regional economic communities, individual states, local border communities, as well as international and extra-regional partners. Since 2011, as part of its annual African Border Day celebrations (June 7), the African Union has focused the attention of all possible actors of power—from local groups and border communities to member states and regional organizations—on the idea of a transborder model of development, cooperation, and conflict resolution: “Our

³⁸ List of countries which have signed, ratified/acceded to the African Union convention on cross-border cooperation (Niamey Convention). AU. 08.07.2024. https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36416-slAFRICAN_UNION_CONVENTION_ON_CROSS-ORDER_COOPERATION_NIAMEY_CONVENTION_0.pdf (accessed: 25.03.2025)

³⁹ African Union Convention on Cross-Border cooperation (Niamey Convention). AU. 2014. https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36416-sl-african_union_convention_on_cross-border_cooperation_niamey_convention.pdf (accessed: 25.03.2025)

⁴⁰ Integrated Border Stability Mechanism Set to Strengthen Border Governance and Security in West African Countries. IOM. 15.09.2023. <https://unofficeny.iom.int/news/integrated-border-stability-mechanism-setstrengthen-border-governance-and-security-west-african-countries> (accessed: 20.11.2025)

borders emerge as instruments of opportunity, playing a crucial role in the pursuit of peace and security across the continent.”⁴¹

CONCLUSION

The most apparent and general conclusion of this study is the functional uniqueness and dynamism of African states' sovereignty, which manifests in the expanding African agency across various levels of international engagement.

The pre-colonial historical experience of Africa documents the predominance of cross-border models in the political processes of African states. Colonialism introduced a new system of political coordinates and anchored political sovereignty to the inviolability of borders. The decolonization of the continent yielded two salient consequences for African states: first, the acceptance of colonial borders as a prerequisite for international recognition and the adaptation of Africans to the post-colonial development model; and second, the advancement of regional integration as a mechanism for fostering African political identity.

Within the framework of the African Union's political pragmatism, the issue of border demarcation and delimitation in Africa has revealed all possible imbalances in political processes, ranging from the escalation of interstate territorial disputes to the challenge of reconciling the principles of sovereignty and regionalism in intra-African interactions. In today's evolving international landscape, marked by persistent armed conflicts across the continent, rising transboundary migration, and intensifying terrorist threats, the African Union continues to address border demarcation and delimitation through cross-border initiatives. However, these efforts often fail to secure consistent support from African states.

The African Union prioritizes the role of sovereign actors in the development and security of the continent while simultaneously promoting the growth of cross-border mechanisms at the regional policy level⁴². Pursuing integrated border governance, the African Union seeks, on the one hand, to consolidate cross-border principles in member states' interactions, and on the other, to strengthen African states' sovereignty through transboundary cooperation.

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⁴¹ Commemorating unity and progress on Africa border day. 14th Edition of Africa Border Day. AU. 07.06.2024. <https://peaceau.org/uploads/commemorating-unity-and-progress-on-africa-border-day-1.pdf> (accessed: 25.03.2025)

⁴² Good Practices Platform on Cross-Border Cooperation in Africa. AU. <https://au.int/pt/node/37336> (accessed: 25.03.2025)

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Научная статья

ФАКТОР СУВЕРЕНИТЕТА В КОНТЕКСТЕ ПОЛИТИКИ АФРИКАНСКОГО СОЮЗА ПО ИНТЕГРИРОВАННОМУ УПРАВЛЕНИЮ ГРАНИЦАМИ

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Аннотация. В данной статье предпринимается попытка рассмотреть подходы Африканского союза (АС) к укреплению суверенитета африканских государств как базового вектора политического развития региона в контексте трансграничной политики организации. В основу положена проблема суверенитета африканских государств и его развития под влиянием инициатив АС. Практический вектор анализа предполагает изучение региональной политики АС по интегрированному управлению границами. Рассматриваются теоретические подходы в изучении роли политических границ как инструмента развития суверенных акторов. Начиная с периода деколонизации, политика государств в отношении границ выступала показателем зрелости политического процесса и индикатором его идейных основ: от неолиберальной и марксистской до постмодернистской традиции. Толкование природы политических границ в Африке коррелирует не только с пониманием возможностей суверенных африканских государств, но выявляет характер взаимовлияния ценностей panaфриканизма и идей территориального национализма. Важным результатом исследования стало понимание индикативного характера проблемы трансграничного управления границами. Концепция трансграничности ставит перед нами вопрос о соотношении потенциала суверенитета африканских государств и инструментов регионализма во внутриафриканском взаимодействии. В условиях растущей субъектности Африки и продвижения принципа

«африканским проблемам – африканские решения» страны континента сталкиваются с вызовами определения политической идентичности и стремятся выработать инклюзивные политические практики. Инициативы АС по вопросам регулирования государственных границ и преодоления негативных явлений, связанных с постколониальной спецификой развития африканских государств, являются важным инструментом АС на пути формирования интегрированного политического пространства Африки.

Ключевые слова: регионализм, суверенитет, panaфриканизм, «слабое государство», трансграничность, *uti possidetis juris*, Ниамейская конвенция

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INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND FOREIGN POLICIES OF THE SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN STATES: CONCEPTUALIZING ROLES AND INTERDEPENDENCIES

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Abstract. The study of international organizations (IOs) has emerged as a sub-discipline in International Relations, with academic debate revolving around areas as different as decision-making, performance and service delivery, agency and reform, autonomy and bureaucracies, peacekeeping and access to leadership positions. Not as much focus has been placed on the complexity of roles that IOs could play in foreign policies of states in the Global South, resulting in interdependencies between national entities and institutions. The article attempts to contribute to this research field by placing the theoretical assumptions concerning the institutional interactions between countries and the UN system entities, “clubs” such as BRICS or G20, and specialized (such as WHO or FAO) and regional (the African Union or African regional economic communities) organizations into the African context. Through systematizing existing approaches to the analysis of interactions between countries and IOs, the paper identifies ten different modes of the interaction between African states and various IOs. While most nations will have an interest in IOs as amplifiers of diplomacy, signalling mechanisms, spaces for socialization or display of identities, as well as springboards to serve their development interest, the content core of such interactions will remain unique to each “state–IO” pair. This work also highlights political ambitions of certain countries in the region and their desire to consolidate their leadership status in the eyes of the international community and brings nuance to the understanding of practical policies of African states in IOs, formulating further research questions.

Keywords: international organizations, multilateralism, Africa, UN, African Union, multilateral cooperation, development agenda, national interests, peacekeeping, integration, global governance

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Since African states gained independence, international organizations (IOs) of various levels have been playing a significant role in their foreign policies as a means of facilitating the pursuit of the states’ broader political objectives and, in certain cases,

serving leadership ambitions of individual states on the continent. This article seeks to systematize the interactions between African nations and principal international institutions. These include formalized intergovernmental organizations, with clearly defined membership criteria, organizational structures, and founding documents, as well as non-formalized groupings and associations that emerged at a later stage in the development of international network diplomacy [Duffield 2007].

LEGITIMIZATION AND SIGNALING THROUGH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

In the early post-colonial years, the United Nations played an important symbolic role, as the full membership in this global organization served as an additional confirmation of the sovereignty of African states and their equality with former colonial powers [Urnov 2011: 8], even though their agency remained limited, both within the global system of international relations and due to the mostly continued orientation of their elites and economic systems toward maintaining close ties with the former colonial powers. By obtaining full membership in the United Nations, they acquired voting rights equal to those of the European nations [Panin 2023b], adhered to the principles of interstate relations enshrined in the UN Charter [Tiunov 2014], while their representatives were now eligible for election to positions of international responsibility. In this way, the United Nations became a channel for legitimizing their statehood: UN membership signified confirmation of sovereignty, recognition of the inviolability of existing borders, and the legitimacy of authority within those borders [Herbst 1996; Alvarez 2016].

Such a perception of the role of the United Nations was also characteristic of separatist and national liberation movements in Africa at a later period: they likewise sought, if not to obtain recognition from the United Nations and regional organizations, then, at least, to establish a certain degree of interaction with them. In particular, almost immediately after the province of Katanga declared independence from Congo, an unrecognized mission was opened in New York in July 1960 [Gerard-Libois 1966]. Similar efforts were undertaken by the leadership of Biafra, which seceded from Nigeria in 1967 [Ignatus 2020; Heerten 2017].

For the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), interaction with the United Nations also played a legitimizing role—especially after the UN General Assembly in 1973 recognized SWAPO as the “authentic representative of the people of Namibia,” who possess an “inalienable and imprescriptible right to self-determination and independence.”¹

A similar role of the United Nations was evident in the lead-up to the independence of Eritrea and South Sudan. Both cases are indicative, as they involved changes to borders on the continent that had remained unchanged since the colonial period, something that until then had been considered impossible². The inviolability of borders was reinforced by one of the inter-African principles, as the Charter of the Organization of African Unity adopted in 1963 stipulated that respect for the sovereignty and territorial

¹ Question of Namibia (A/RES/3111). *UN*. 12.12.1973. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/191238?v=pdf> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

² The United Nations and the independence of Eritrea. UN Department of Political Information. DPI/1850. *UN Digital Library*. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/229464?v=pdf>

integrity of African states determines their “inalienable right to independent existence.”³ The UN involvement made it possible to achieve consensus around the legitimacy of these processes amid concerns that the legalization of secession could lead to a broader rise in separatist sentiments⁴.

On the most acute items of the international agenda, international organizations may also reflect the collective position of their member states, acting as “signal beacons” and providing reference points for foreign policies of individual countries. The imposition of sanctions, suspension of membership, expulsion from an organization, and problematization of a domestic situation through placing it as an issue on the agenda of the UN Security Council and General Assembly, or of regional organizations, provide other states with grounds to reconsider previous formats of bilateral relations. For example, South Africa’s membership in the United Nations was suspended in 1974⁵. The mobilization of efforts by the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity⁶ (in particular, their joint World Conference for Action against Apartheid held in Lagos in 1977) also made it possible to “break” the resistance of the most influential Western states, which leaned toward “constructive engagement” with the apartheid regime and were therefore unwilling to support its international isolation.

More “soft” measures undertaken by organizations may also play a role—for instance, through “public shaming,” especially in matters of human rights compliance, constitutionality, and security, which serves as a signal that more serious consequences may ensue [Squatrito, Lundgren, Sommerer 2019]. This, however, does not negate the selectivity and politicization of “shaming” and does not guarantee the intended impact on a country’s policies. The electoral crisis in The Gambia that erupted in 2016 is such an example: pressure from the African Union, which condemned Yahya Jammeh’s decision to annul the election’s results and remain in power, did not lead to a peaceful transfer of power. This required an operation to restore democracy by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and additional diplomatic efforts by both regional neighbors and the United Nations.

On the other hand, restoration of membership and lifting of sanctions and embargoes send a signal of a state’s reintegration into the international community, facilitating further restoration of bilateral ties. Thus, following the completion of the power transit in South Africa, the UN General Assembly restored the country’s full membership in the United Nations and removed apartheid from its agenda in June 1994⁷.

A similar signal is sent through IOs when state leaders that came to power through unconstitutional means are granted the opportunity to address the UN General Assembly (or to participate in a summit of any other organization). For example, the presence of Mamady Doumbouya, who led the coup in Guinea in September 2021, at the 78th session

³ OAU Charter. 25.05.1963. AU. https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/7759-file-oau_charter_1963.pdf (accessed: 07.03.2025)

⁴ The United Nations and the independence of Eritrea. UN Department of Political Information. DPI/1850. *UN Digital Library*. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/229464?v=pdf>

⁵ Teltsch K. South Africa is Suspended by U.N. Assembly, 91-22. *The New York Times*. 13.11.1974. <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/11/13/archives/south-africa-is-suspended-by-un-assembly-9122-un-session-barssouth.html> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

⁶ Organization of African Unity (OAU) was an African intergovernmental organization, the predecessor of the African Union (AU), established in 1963 in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) with the participation of 33 governments.

⁷ Elimination of apartheid and establishment of a united, democratic and non-racial South Africa (resolution). A/RES/48/258. UN. 06.07.1994. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/194333?ln=en&v=pdf> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

of the UN General Assembly⁸, and his meeting with the UN Secretary-General, could be seen as a de facto recognition of legitimacy, in spite of continued international criticism of the regime, including concerns from the UN⁹, and despite the fact that the African Union continues to consider Guinea's membership suspended¹⁰.

“DIPLOMATIC MULTIPLIERS”

Most African countries do not have an extensive network of diplomatic missions, and their diplomatic services often lack resources comparable to the budgets of the Foreign Ministries of many other states. Still, the range of issues of interest to African states is rather broad, which is why they have to prioritize their efforts on the international stage. In particular, during its term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (2020–2021), Niger established a special department within the Prime Minister's Office and tripled the diplomatic staff of its mission in New York by assigning its most experienced diplomats. However, even then, Niamey's diplomatic capabilities remained far more limited than those of other Council members. As a result, a decision was made to concentrate the efforts exclusively on the situation in the Sahel during Niger's rotational presidency of the Security Council [Souaré 2023].

IOs give African countries an opportunity to “turn up the volume” of their voice on the most salient of the issues. Engagement in coalitions formed on the margins of the UN or other organizations makes it possible to seek solutions to problems that might otherwise remain outside international attention [Urnov 2011: 11; Panke 2020]. Although African countries account for nearly 30% of all UN mandates, the effective articulation of their positions without amplifying their voice through close coordination often remains ineffective [Urnov 2011: 9; Panke 2019]. Since 1966, the African Group has held three non-permanent seats on the UN Security Council, and it is precisely the format of the “African Troika” (A3), underpinned by work carried out within the African Union, rather than individual diplomatic practice, that enables the continent's countries to bring the most significant issues into the spotlight [Panin 2023a].

Authorship and joint drafting of resolutions (penholding) allow states to be part of shaping the agenda, albeit indirectly. Formal decision-making rules of the UN Security Council (and of other bodies of the UN system) leave room for informal practices that also play a role in strengthening negotiating positions of “weaker” states, while their engagement results in a greater international legitimacy for the decisions adopted.

Although the majority of draft resolutions are penned by the permanent members of the UN Security Council, which allows them to set the tone of the discussion and control its substance [Gifkins 2021], their seeking support of regional groups (or presenting a draft as an initiative of regional states affected by the resolution) enhances that regional state's bargaining leverage. In particular, a U.S. diplomatic cable leaked by *WikiLeaks* underscored the significance of Ghana's support for a U.S.–UK–French draft resolution

⁸ General Debate. General Assembly. *UN*. 21.09.2023. <https://gadebate.un.org/en/78/guinea> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

⁹ Guinée: un rapport des Nations unies évalue le régime de Mamadi Doumbouya. *Jeune Afrique*. 21.01.2025. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1649956/politique/guinee-un-rapport-des-nations-unies-etvalue-le-regime-de-mamadi-doumbouya/> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

¹⁰ Communiqué of the 1030th meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council on the situation in the Republic of Guinea. *AU*. 16.09.2021. <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/communique-of-the-1030th-meeting-held-on-10-september-2021-on-the-situation-in-the-republic-of-guinea> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

on the deployment of a hybrid operation in Darfur, in the absence of such support from other AU member states. Ghana's position, as it was assumed, would be pivotal in orienting the voting of other UNSC members and serving as a counterweight to the views of China, South Africa, and Qatar¹¹.

Penholding of certain topics of resolutions allows a state to acquire additional political weight by demonstrating leadership and assuming responsibility for an international decision. Conducting negotiations on a resolution, coordinating and smoothing positions (especially of the authors and addressees of a resolution), introducing amendments and moderating discussions—all of this enables smaller and less influential states to gain diplomatic experience and bolster their international image [Gifkins 2021]. For instance, while serving as a member of the UN Security Council in 2016–2017, Senegal partnered with the United States on drafting a resolution aimed at enhancing cooperation between the UN and regional organizations, in particular, the African Union¹², which was then adopted in November 2016¹³.

It should be noted, however, that penholding of resolutions most often comes as a result of “delegated authority” by the three Western permanent members of the UN Security Council (P3), rather than as an own initiative of a state, even though the “penholder right” is not formally restricted. However, the permanent members of the UNSC, by virtue of their veto power, exert control over which issues are brought to discussion and in what way [Farrall et al. 2019]. For this reason, the Permanent Representative of Mali appealed to the UN Security Council in March 2023, demanding the withdrawal of France as penholder on all agenda UNSC items on the situation in Mali, citing doubts about Paris's objectivity and impartiality¹⁴.

Table 1 shows that African states have no “penholder right” even on issues that directly concern the situation in the region. An exception is West Africa, as the subregional states have more opportunities to set the tone of the discussion, although this has been a “co-authorship” with Western states since 2018. The West retains a privileged role with regard to which provisions are included in the draft resolutions [Adu et al. 2023]. Nevertheless, penholding distribution in the UN Security Council indicates that the situation has been gradually changing, and the Western P3 are now more willing to “share the pen” with representatives of Africa.

The gradual incorporation of African representatives into penholding practices contributes to the erosion of the structural power of the collective West and reduces the likelihood that the positions of regional states on issues directly affecting them will be ignored [Adu et al. 2023]. However, it is evident that progress remains extremely limited.

¹¹ AU/UN Hybrid in Darfur: Narrowing Differences. *Wikileaks*. 2007. <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/07/07USUNNEWYORK563.html> (accessed: 07.03.2025).

¹² Enhancing the relationship between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, in particular the African Union. UN Security Council. S/2016/977. Draft resolution / Senegal and United States of America. *UN*. 18.11.2016. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/848796?&=pdf> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

¹³ UN Security Council. Resolution 2320 (2016) on enhancing the relationship between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, in particular the African Union. *UN*. 18.11.2016. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/849567> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

¹⁴ Letter from the Permanent Representative of Mali to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council. UN Security Council. *UN*. 01.03.2023. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4006785?v=pdf> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

Table 1. Penholding allocation on African issues in the UN Security Council

Agenda Item	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Burundi	France	France	France	France	France	France	France	France	France	France	France
Central Africa, incl. CAR	France	France	France, UK	France, UK	France, UK	France, UK	France, UK	France, UK	France, UK	France, UK	France, UK, Mozambique
Cote-d'Ivoire	France	France	France	France	France	France	France	France	France	France	France
DR Congo	France	France	France	France	France	France	France	France	France	France	France, Sierra Leone
Ethiopia / Tigray	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	Ireland	–	–
Great Lakes	France	France	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	France	France
Guinea-Bissau	Nigeria	Nigeria	Senegal	Senegal	Cote-d'Ivoire	Cote-d'Ivoire	Niger	Niger	–	–	–
Liberia	U.S.	U.S.	U.S.	U.S.	U.S.	U.S.	U.S.	U.S.	U.S.	U.S.	–
Libya	UK	UK	UK	UK	UK	UK, Germ.	UK, Germ.	UK	UK	UK	UK
Mali	France	France	France	France	France	France	France	France	France	France	France
Sierra Leone	UK	UK	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Somalia	U.S., UK	U.S., UK	U.S., UK	U.S., UK	U.S., UK	U.S., UK	U.S., UK	U.S., UK	U.S., UK	UK	UK
Sudan, South Sudan	UK, U.S.	UK, U.S.	UK, U.S.	UK, U.S.	UK, U.S.	U.S., UK, Germ.	U.S., UK, Germ.	UK, U.S.	UK, U.S.	UK, U.S.	UK, U.S.

Compiled by the author from Security Council Report materials <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org>

At the same time, the assumption of a more active role by a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council under the influence of the Council's permanent members (for example, the UK and France, the two countries that most often act as penholders on African issues) may become subject to bargaining: support for a favorable draft resolution may be “exchanged” for a promise to expand development assistance—the informal price of such support. Donor states may use financial aid as an instrument of exerting political pressure rather than as a means of addressing humanitarian problems. A developing country serving on the UN Security Council may expect, on average, a 59% increase in U.S. aid and a 170% increase during periods when issues of particular importance to Washington are placed on the Council's agenda [Kuziemko, Werker 2006]. Research shows that U.S. aid to African states correlates with their voting behavior in the UN General Assembly, seeking an erosion of African support for China [Xu, Wan, Chen 2024]. This, however, concerns not only the United States but also other donor states

[Strand, Tuman 2012], while “vote trading” does not eliminate diplomatic pressure [Panin 2023b]. Such “vote trading” or “exchange of favors” may become an instrument for obtaining benefits at minimal cost—especially when the vote concerns issues that are not of fundamental importance for the foreign policy of the states casting their votes.

REDUCTION OF COSTS, SOCIALIZATION AND REFLECTION OF IDENTITIES

Amid limited financial resources, systemic shortage of personnel, and insufficient in-house expertise on certain issues, IOs enable African countries to establish contacts with a wide circle of states while incurring minimal costs for maintaining these contacts.

Appendix 1 shows that the aggregate contribution of African states to the United Nations did not exceed 1.2% of its total budget in 2023. Their contribution to the International Labour Organization (ILO) was likewise around 1%, to UNESCO about 2%, and to the World Health Organization (WHO) approximately 3%. Only the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) somewhat stands out, with a total contribution of 10%, half of which is accounted for by South Sudan (see *Appendix 2*).

At the same time, there is no correlation between a country’s GDP (PPP) and its financial contribution. Egypt, the continent’s largest economy, ranks fifth in its financial contribution to the UN, whereas Kenya—the seventh-largest economy—takes first place. Zimbabwe’s economy ranks 23rd in Africa, while Harare’s contribution places the country eighth in the ranking. Angola presents a reverse situation: the 8th economy ranks 26th in its contribution to the UN budget. The contributions of some countries are symbolic: Djibouti closes the list with a contribution of USD 10,200¹⁵. Nor can one discern indisputable “leaders” in financing IOs, as countries prioritize their multilateral participation differently. For example, South Africa accounts for 1% of Africa’s total financial contribution to the UN and for 2% in the case of the WHO.

Beyond using IOs as a “springboard” for diplomatic activity, cost reduction can also be manifested more directly when states derive greater benefits from an organization’s program activities than the costs they incur through membership contributions. As such, Nigeria—the continent’s second-largest economy—receives about 11.5% of WHO funding in Africa, nearly USD 181 million in absolute terms, while its contribution amounts to USD 6.9 million¹⁶. The same can be said of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (USD 140 million received in support with a contribution of USD 7.5 million, which is even more than Nigeria) or Ethiopia (USD 95 million in support with a contribution of USD 200 thousand). African countries receive the larger share of direct financial benefits from membership in the WHO, if one considers the regional distribution of the organization’s budget worldwide¹⁷. A separate aspect concerns regional African institutions that strive for financial independence from external donors

¹⁵ The same applies to other international organizations. In 2023, Liberia’s contribution to the financing of the FAO amounted to USD 4,722; those of Gambia, Burundi, Eritrea, and Djibouti to the WHO budget amounted to USD 4,780; those of Somalia, Liberia, the Central African Republic, Guinea-Bissau, Djibouti, Burundi, and several other countries to the ILO amounted to USD 4,157; and Sierra Leone’s contribution to UNESCO amounted to USD 2,700. For more details, see: WHO Programme Budget 2024–2025. Africa. WHO. <https://open.who.int/2024-25/regions/AFR/flow> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

¹⁶ WHO Program Budget 2024–2025. Africa. WHO. <https://open.who.int/2024-25/regions/AFR/flow> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

¹⁷ Ibid.

[Gottschalk 2024]. However, the practice of “externalizing” costs while retaining the ability to extract benefits from membership in the African Union could be seen as another confirmation of the deliberate use of institutions to enhance the effectiveness of foreign policy activities at a minimal cost.

Membership in international organizations facilitates the “socialization” of the states, including that of political elites and diplomatic services. Through continuous participation in negotiations, committee meetings, and sideline encounters, a gradual convergence of views and discourse takes place, which is reinforced by peer pressure—the alignment of one’s behavior and positions with informal expectations that influences which issues a country considers a priority and spotlights and supports in voting [Chelotti, Dasandi, Mikhaylov 2022]. In addition, the collective membership of African states in the African Union contributes to mutual understanding, even against the backdrop of persistent contradictions and tension among individual countries [Gottschalk 2024].

Socialization here is understood as either the adoption of values of a broad range of actors or the reinforcement of pre-held views and interests under the influence of an external environment in which the same ideas are practiced [Bearce, Bondanella 2007]. Indirect evidence of this can be found in statements delivered at the UN General Assembly, which can potentially shed more light on state preferences than their voting behavior, since their structure and topical focus are decided by the countries themselves—that is, with the influence of informal expectations of the UN’s social environment but without external pressure or “penholder” restrictions [Jönsson 2003].

An analysis of the statements made by delegates of the 16 most populous African countries at the 79th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2024 showed that, despite differences in approaches and priorities, African states, *first*, demonstrate their “embeddedness” in the broader international context (with references to multilateralism and UN principles); *second*, maneuver between the expectations of their partners—with references to democracy, respect for human rights, and climate neutrality (“Western agenda”), while invoking issues of double standards and harmful effects of unilateral sanctions and stressing the importance of sovereignty (“BRICS agenda”). *Third*, they promote pan-African interests (development, debt relief, attracting financing, including peacekeeping, food security, poverty reduction, youth development as social capital, and other related issues).

Membership in an international organization can also send a signal about the identity that a country embraces. Regionalism (for example, subregional integration groupings in Africa) is the most illustrative example. However, even in this case the “declared” identity may change under the influence of political circumstances, leading to duplication or overlap. For instance, in 1976, at the initiative of Zaire (today’s Democratic Republic of the Congo), the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries was established, bringing together Zaire, Burundi, and Rwanda. At the time, this configuration reflected the shared colonial past of Ruanda-Urundi and the Belgian Congo, as well as the desire to preserve economic ties. Soon the situation changed, and the DRC prioritized an “expanded” East Africa identity through the accession to the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and, somewhat later, took on a Central Africa identity through membership in the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). As the crisis in relations between the DRC and Rwanda deepened, the “East African” component of the DRC’s identity has become less salient. This was manifested in the DRC’s accession to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in 1997 as a

balancing act. With tensions renewed in 2025, this was further evident in Kinshasa's rejection of the East African Community's peacekeeping mission in favor of a contingent from SADC.

The withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and their parallel establishment of the Alliance of Sahel States may likewise be interpreted as a shift in political course and manifestation of a new subregional identity.

A SPRINGBOARD FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF INTERESTS

In one way or another, IOs may act as intermediaries that enable states to derive benefits from their membership in accordance with their priorities and national interests. Through IOs, states seek to create or maintain favorable conditions for their development, and they aim to enhance their international image and prestige through leadership on specific issue areas within IOs.

African states are certainly using their IO memberships as a "springboard" that allows them to articulate their challenges and needs to a broad audience, conduct negotiations "on the margins," and project preliminary agreements to the bilateral agenda. In particular, when addressing the UN General Assembly in 2024, representatives of the DRC, Uganda, Morocco, and Madagascar, alongside discussing international issues, called on other countries to invest in specific sectors of their economies. Existing research shows that participation in international organizations can have a positive effect on inflows of foreign direct investment (FDI) into national economies [Dreher, Mikosch, Voigt 2015].

In general terms, a state's choice of the most suitable IO platform for pursuing its objectives is linked to two main aspects: institutional design (composition of participants, range of addressed issues, decision-making procedures, enforcement mechanisms) and the state's ability to turn all these aspects to its advantage. For example, throughout its post-apartheid history, South Africa sought to avoid active engagement with the Bretton Woods institutions for attracting investment and financing. To address this task, Pretoria relied on being an "invited participant" at G7 summits, as well as on the financial architecture of BRICS and the African Union—and only the COVID-19 pandemic, which required emergency measures, brought adjustments to this approach. Still, South Africa's use of institutions alternative to the IMF and the World Bank made it possible for the country to secure greater flexibility or more preferential conditions in attracting financial resources.

Another example is the discussion of international labor standards under the auspices of the World Trade Organization (WTO), which was initiated by a coalition of Western countries. Most developing states, including African (with whose interests South Africa officially associates its "voice" in the UN, BRICS, G20, and other multilateral platforms), opposed consideration of the issue outside the International Labor Organization (ILO), fearing that Western countries might use this as a hidden form of protectionism to put a cap on competitive advantages of countries with cheaper labor. In this case, Pretoria supported the position of the U.S., France, and Norway, since South Africa was then in the final stages of its democratic transition from apartheid, and it was more important for the country to play the "ideology" card by emphasizing its commitment to human rights and drawing on a strong tradition of trade unionism. Moreover, this stance was helpful for improving relations with the West, which was instrumental for economic recovery after a prolonged period of sanctions and other restrictive measures [Murphy, Kellow 2013].

On another issue within the WTO, the South African government, by contrast, took the initiative in defending the interests of the Global South. By the early 2000s, the problem of HIV prevalence had become markedly acute in South Africa¹⁸. Given this, the government sought greater accessibility of therapies, including through generics of original medicines and compulsory licensing, but it encountered resistance from originator companies—Pfizer, GSK, and Merck—backed by the United States, which initiated legal proceedings on the grounds that South Africa was violating TRIPS¹⁹. Pretoria, however, succeeded in bringing together a coalition of developing countries, the World Health Organization, and relevant non-governmental organizations, which allowed it to bring the issue of pharmaceutical security in the context of the HIV epidemic to the UN General Assembly’s attention in 2001. Ultimately, confirmation of the legality of South Africa’s actions, which helped expand production of generics, came with the adoption of the Declaration on TRIPS and Public Health²⁰. To a large extent, this success was made possible by the efforts of South African diplomacy [Halbert 2002]. In a similar vein, South Africa used the WTO during the COVID-19 pandemic in support of its “vaccine diplomacy,” seeking to represent the interests of developing countries jointly with India²¹.

The conferral by IOs of various formal statuses also enables states to obtain advantages, for which they may deliberately maintain their international posture within certain bounds. Thus, the retention of the “least developed country” (LDC) status contributes to higher exports, especially agriculture and light manufacturing, as well as facilitates access to greater international assistance [Klasen et al. 2020]. After the LDC status was removed from Botswana in 1994, the volume of official development assistance (ODA) declined by 43% over the subsequent five years compared to the preceding five-year period and by a further 52% over the following five years²². Other countries on the continent, such as Angola, have sought to delay the removal of this status: in light of its socio-economic situation and persistent recession risks, Luanda retained LDC status first in 2021 and then again in 2024. Possession of LDC status enabled Angola, inter alia, to justify the preservation of preferences under the U.S. AGOA program²³.

¹⁸ Whereas HIV prevalence among the adult population in South Africa stood at 1.3% in 1990, this figure had risen to 15% by 2003. Prevalence of HIV. *World Development Indicators*. World Bank Group. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.DYN.AIDS.ZS> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

¹⁹ The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) is an international agreement that forms part of the package of documents establishing the World Trade Organization and sets minimum standards for the recognition and protection of the principal categories of intellectual property.

²⁰ Declaration on the TRIPS agreement and Public Health. Doha Ministerial Conference Declarations. *WTO*. 14.11.2001. https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/ddec_e.pdf (accessed: 07.03.2025)

²¹ India and South Africa proposal for WTO waiver from intellectual property protections for COVID-19-related medical technologies. *Médecins Sans Frontières*. 18.11.2020. https://msfaccess.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/COVID_Brief_WTO_WaiverProposal_ENG_v2_18Nov2020.pdf (accessed: 07.03.2025)

²² Net official development assistance (constant 2021 US\$). *World Development Indicators*. *World Bank Group*. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ODAT.KD> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

²³ The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) was adopted in 2000. Its purpose is to grant selected Sub-Saharan African countries duty-free access to the U.S. market for more than 6,400 product categories. It should be noted, however, that possession of LDC status as such is not a guarantee of receiving particular preferences. Political factors play a significant role: for example, the United States excluded Burundi—one of Africa’s least developed countries—from the AGOA program in 2015, citing political repression and the suppression of opposition within the country. At the end of September 2025, the program was suspended and, as of November

The attitudes of African states toward BRICS and G20 are also illustrative. While external discourse surrounding their interest in these formats is mostly focused on politico-ideological aspects [Fituni 2022] and the considerations associated with joining an exclusive and prestigious club²⁴, the discussion within African states most often unfolds in economic terms, as evidenced by the cases of Nigeria²⁵, Uganda²⁶, Ghana²⁷, and Kenya²⁸. Thus, according to the cited publication, Kenya's interest in BRICS lies in diversifying the country's sources of capital and in expanding trade ties. When joining BRIC, South Africa likewise linked their expectations to economic considerations: accelerating economic growth, attracting investment and expanding trade, positive effects on employment, and progress toward the objectives of the National Development Plan [Panin 2023c].

Using IOs as “springboards” for advancing interests is linked not only to economic considerations but also to security. For example, in light of the intensification of extremism and banditry within the country, Nigeria took the initiative at the United Nations to promote an international regime for controlling the circulation of small arms and light weapons. This issue became central in a number of addresses that Nigerian leaders presented at the UN General Assembly, which was also reflected in Nigeria's leadership during the UN Review Conference on the implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons [Panin 2025], as well as in Abuja's promotion of this agenda within ECOWAS [Atidoga, Yakubu, Lamidi 2024].

In combating Boko Haram²⁹, the Nigerian authorities made use of various international formats (the UN, the AU, ECOWAS, the Lake Chad Basin Commission), deriving different advantages and forms of assistance from each of them, while avoiding direct external involvement, thereby preserving maximum autonomy in decision-making and minimizing reputational losses as a regional power [Henneberg, Plank 2019].

Cooperation with sector-specific and regional organizations can serve governments not only as a means of increasing the effectiveness of policy programs (for example, through the exchange of experience or the involvement of international experts) but also as a way to share responsibility for outcomes or to avoid criticism for unpopular decisions and reforms [Panke 2020]. In such cases, organizations act as a “buffer” between governments and the population, as authorities can claim that decisions were taken collectively rather than at the national level. For example, in February 2024, the

2025, was not renewed. See: Obama bars Burundi from AGOA. *African Business*. 02.11.2015. <https://african.business/2015/11/economy/obama-bars-burundi-from-agoa> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

²⁴ Zelenova D. The African Agenda of BRICS: Challenges and Prospects of Multipolarity. *Valdai International Discussion Club*. 22.10.2024. (In Russ.). <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/afrikanskaya-povestka-briks/> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

²⁵ Onyeiwu S. Nigeria's Brics partnership: economist outlines potential benefits. *The Conversation*. 05.02.2025. <https://theconversation.com/nigerias-brics-partnership-economist-outlines-potential-benefits-248943> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

²⁶ What Uganda's “BRICS Partner Country” status means. *The Independent*. 31.10.2024. <https://www.independent.co.ug/what-ugandas-brics-partner-country-status-means/> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

²⁷ Ogundele A. The future of Ghana's development and the BRICS opportunity. *GhanaWeb*. 03.02.2025. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/The-future-of-Ghana-s-development-and-the-BRICS-opportunity-1970019> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

²⁸ Maina M. Kenya, a US Ally, Seeks China's Backing to Join BRICS. *Kenyan Foreign Policy*. 07.11.2024. <https://kenyanforeignpolicy.com/kenya-a-us-ally-seeks-chinas-backing-to-join-brics/> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

²⁹ Banned in the Russian Federation.

Nigeria Labour Congress shifted responsibility for the country's energy crisis onto the IMF and the World Bank³⁰, and in most African countries, these two organizations are blamed for the failure of structural adjustment programs and the growth of debt burdens. Similarly, part of the blame for inadequate measures to combat the spread of the Ebola virus in West Africa was placed on the WHO³¹, while during the COVID-19 pandemic, the authorities of Equatorial Guinea accused a WHO representative of falsifying morbidity data and “inflating” the scale of the epidemic³².

MEDIATION AND PEACEKEEPING

The role of international organizations as providers of security has been well described, and it is also frequently criticized—both in academic publications [Volkov et al. 2019; Bokeria 2022; Denisova, Kostelyanets 2023; Tull 2023] and by governments and local populations³³.

Leaving aside questions of the practical implementation of IOs' peacekeeping potential, it should be noted that various international organizations often become the “first line” of support for a country on whose territory a conflict is unfolding. It is IOs, rather than states or mediators, that establish dialogue between the parties, seeking to pave the way toward trust [Edwards, DiCicco 2018], although such efforts most often achieve limited success and only constitute the initial stage on the path to settlement. This is clearly illustrated by the ongoing conflicts in Sudan and in eastern DRC (including the efforts of SADC and EAC, whose summit provided a venue for a meeting between the leaders of the DRC and Rwanda in Tanzania in February 2025³⁴, yet failed to achieve a significant change in the parties' positions or affect the course of the conflict).

In addition to reconciliation efforts, international organizations are tasked with facilitating humanitarian corridors and collecting information about ongoing developments—not so much regarding military aspects as the humanitarian situation and the related challenges and threats, including epidemics, access to water and food, forced displacement, and protection of civilians. The dissemination of this information among states and the wider public makes it possible to draw the attention of the international community to a conflict and, to some extent, to bring closer the search for an optimal formula for its resolution. Thus, during the renewed escalation of the conflict between government forces and the M23 movement in eastern DRC, which began in December

³⁰ Adonu C. NLC blames IMF, World Bank for power sector crisis in Nigeria. *Vanguard*. 23.02.2024. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/02/nlc-blames-imf-world-bank-for-power-sector-crisis-in-nigeria/> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

³¹ Burrows T. WHO admits botching response to Ebola as man who discovered virus blames UN's 'incompetent' African offices. *Daily Mail Online*. 17.10.2014. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2797439/world-health-organization-admits-botching-response-ebola-blaming-incompetent-african-offices.html> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

³² La Guinée Equatoriale demande le départ de la représentante de l'OMS. *Le Figaro*. 02.06.2020. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/la-guinee-equatoriale-demande-le-depart-de-la-representante-de-l-oms-20200602> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

³³ Anyadike O. The changing face of peacekeeping: What's gone wrong with the UN? *The New Humanitarian*. 09.07.2024. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2024/07/09/changing-face-peacekeeping-whats-gone-wrong-un> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

³⁴ Rwandan and Congolese leaders join summit on eastern DRC conflict. *The Guardian*. 08.02.2025. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/08/rwandan-and-congolese-leaders-join-summit-on-eastern-drc-conflict> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

2024, various organizations within the UN system—WHO, UNESCO, and UNHCR—highlighted their respective “sectoral” dimensions of the conflict, creating a more comprehensive picture of events^{35, 36}.

Finally, international institutions may help disputing states avoid a full-scale conflict, as they could act as “arbitrators” under conditions of equality of the parties, preservation of their reputations, regulated procedures, mechanisms for appealing decisions. For example, the Permanent Court of Arbitration³⁷ contributed to settling a border dispute between Sudan and South Sudan (at the time the latter was an autonomous entity rather than an independent state) over the Abyei area. In 2009, the arbitral tribunal established new boundaries and introduced a principle of joint administration by the parties, which facilitated South Sudan’s eventual independence, although it did not fully satisfy either side [Siblesz 2019]. Another example is the dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon over the Bakassi Peninsula, which was resolved in 2006 on the basis of proceedings before the International Court of Justice, initiated by Cameroon³⁸. As a result, Cameroon succeeded in establishing sovereignty over the disputed territory, although the Nigerian Senate subsequently refused to ratify the agreement.

CONSOLIDATION OF STATUS

Participation in international institutions can also reinforce a state’s ambitions and status. Since the notion of “status” is a socio-psychological construct [Larson, Shevchenko 2019], state positioning is linked not only to foreign policy actions but also to recognition by other states [Renshon 2017] and social embeddedness of such an identity [Murray 2019]. Given this, international institutions become the most convenient arenas for demonstrating leadership. Of particular importance are “informal clubs,” such as BRICS and the G20, where there are no formal membership criteria and the admission of new participants depends on how they are perceived by existing members of the club.

South Africa, for example, plays a unique role in the G20. It became the only African state to receive an initial invitation to join the forum after U.S. President Bill Clinton put forward such an initiative in 1997³⁹. Subsequently, the format and composition of participants changed—the Willard Group, the G33, and once again the G20—but Pretoria retained its position throughout [Boulle 2011]. South Africa is also a frequent guest at G7 summits (having first received such an invitation in 2000), and, moreover, it was the only

³⁵ Dire health and humanitarian crisis in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo prompts escalation of efforts by WHO, partners. *WHO*. 07.02.2025. <https://www.who.int/news/item/07-02-2025-dire-health-and-humanitarian-crisis-in-eastern-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-prompts-escalation-of-efforts-by-who--partners> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

³⁶ Displacement in Eastern DRC and Neighbouring Countries. Two-Month Impact Report. 2025. *UNHCR*. <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/DRC%20Two-month%20Impact%20Report.pdf> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

³⁷ The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) is an international arbitral tribunal located in The Hague, the Netherlands. It was established in 1899 by decision of the First Hague Peace Conference (18 May–29 June 1899), convened at the initiative of Emperor Nicholas II of Russia. The PCA is the oldest international organization dedicated to the peaceful settlement of international disputes.

³⁸ Nigeria, Cameroon Sign Agreement Ending Decades-Old Border Dispute. *UN*. 02.06.2006. <https://press.un.org/en/2006/afr1397.doc.htm> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

³⁹ A Guide to Committees, Groups, Clubs. *IMF*. <https://www.imf.org/en/About/Factsheets/A-Guide-to-Committees-Groups-and-Clubs> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

African participant in the G8+5 format⁴⁰. A similar situation persisted in BRICS, where Pretoria for a long time remained the sole “voice” of Africa. This kind of “status resource” made it possible to claim that South Africa was speaking on behalf of the entire continent⁴¹, which bolstered the country’s external image as a leading regional power in Africa, although this status does not enjoy unequivocal support among other African states.

Nigeria’s leadership ambitions are likewise reflected in its participation in international organizations. For a long time, representatives of Abuja pointed out that Nigeria played first fiddle in containing Africa’s conflict potential by providing substantial contingents to UN peacekeeping forces⁴². After 2010, when domestic security challenges intensified, this argument became less prominent, and President Bola Tinubu has placed greater emphasis on engagement with BRICS and G20, similar to South Africa [Panin 2025].

Consolidation of status is also influenced by which international events countries host, as well as by which bodies of international organizations are located on their territory. For example, Ethiopia often positions itself as Africa’s “diplomatic capital,”⁴³ while Kenya constructs a narrative of a major “international hub,” drawing on the fact that one of the UN headquarters⁴⁴ is located in Nairobi⁴⁵. The decision to locate the UN Office for West Africa in Dakar strengthened Senegal’s special role in the subregion [Urnov 2011: 12] amid Nigeria’s leadership ambitions.

International organizations may also serve as an additional channel for lobbying state interests not only through their formal mandates but also through “embedding” national representatives within the ranks of international bureaucracies. Nationals of countries such as Tanzania, Mali, The Gambia, South Africa, and Ghana have, at various times, held a range of senior positions within the UN system [Urnov 2011: 12].

Nigeria has been particularly successful in this: the country has represented the African Group at the United Nations more frequently than other African states (the Nigerian Amina J. Mohammed became UN Deputy Secretary-General in 2017, and Nigeria is the only African country whose representative has twice served as President of the UN General Assembly). Since 1972, Nigeria’s Permanent Representatives to the UN have traditionally held the post of Chair of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C34)⁴⁶. Diezani Alison-Madueke, Nigeria’s Minister of Petroleum

⁴⁰ An informal platform between the Group of Eight (G8) and the largest developing economies at the time (Brazil, China, India, Mexico, South Africa), which existed from 2005 to 2008. The countries of the “Five” were viewed as potential candidates for full membership in the G8.

⁴¹ Zuma, Jacob (President). *The Quest for Growth and Stability. South Africa’s philosophy of interconnectedness. The G20 Mexico Summit 2012. G20 Information Centre. Trinity College.* <http://www.g7g20.utoronto.ca/books/loscabos/zuma.html> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

⁴² General Assembly, 65th session: 14th plenary meeting. *UN.* 24.09.2010. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/693750?v=pdf> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

⁴³ Teklemariam S. Addis Ababa, Africa’s Diplomatic Capital. *The Diplomatic Society.* 20.06.2018. <https://thediplomaticsociety.co.za/2486-addis-ababa-africas-diplomatic-capital> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

⁴⁴ Kenya hosts the headquarters of two entities within the UN system: the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).

⁴⁵ Kisia A. United Nations set to open three new global offices in Nairobi. *The Star.* 19.02.2025. <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2025-02-19-un-to-open-three-new-global-offices-in-nairobi> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

⁴⁶ Dietrich T., Keller N., Tierno D., Moeller M. Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations. Background Guide. *NMUN.* <https://nmun.org/assets/documents/conference-archives/new-york/2019/ny19-bgg-c-34.pdf> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

Resources, became the first woman to serve as the OPEC President (2014–2015). Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, formerly Nigeria’s Minister of Finance and Minister of Foreign Affairs, has headed the World Trade Organization (WTO) since 2021. In October 2025, the Nigerian Philip Mshelbila was elected Secretary-General of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF).

When selecting staff for the structures of the African Union, the influence of individual member states also plays a role, and countries are interested in seeing their representatives appointed to positions of responsibility [Tieku, Gänzle, Trondalet 2020]. For example, South Africa succeeded in 2012 in securing the election of Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma as Chairperson of the AU Commission, in violation of an informal practice whereby more influential states were expected to refrain from lobbying for their own candidates for this post⁴⁷. During the campaign to elect a new Chairperson of the AU Commission in 2025, Kenya’s ambitions were particularly evident, as it sought to secure the position for the former Prime Minister Raila Odinga—to this end, there was even a special increase in the budget of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs⁴⁸.

CONCLUSION

The conceptual possibilities of interaction between African states and IOs examined in this article represent a first attempt to systematize academically the complexity of roles and interdependencies. It should be acknowledged that the article is of a generalizing nature, while the practical combination of different modes of interaction and the significance of each of the components discussed remain unique to each specific country⁴⁹.

Figure 1 below is intended to schematically illustrate this, as well as summarize the main ideas set out in the article.

Each arrow symbolizes an interaction significant for a state. However, the substance of such an interaction and its priority vary. Some states play a more active role in these interactions (Nigeria in the provision of peacekeeping contingents or the deployment of peacekeeping operations under the auspices of ECOWAS), while others play a more passive role (peacekeeping missions on the territory of the DRC). The meanings, nuances, political expediencies, and degree of state agency in interactions with IOs could be the subject of a separate study.

There are also a number of other questions in the study of such interactions. What is the relationship between IOs and African understandings of multipolarity? In which cases do states prefer to “bypass” organizations, and when do they act “through” them? What influence do organizations exert on the positions of African states and on their perceptions of their place in the world system? Finally, in light of the absence of

⁴⁷ Tikum N. Prejudice disguised as critique: The legacy of AU Commission Chair Dlamini-Zuma. *Pambazuka News*. 28.07.2016. <https://pambazuka.org/prejudice-disguised-critique-legacy-au-commission-chair-dlamini-zuma> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

⁴⁸ Mumby L. How Foreign Affairs budget increased to fund Raila’s failed AU bid – Treasury. *The Eastleigh Voice*. 24.06.2023. <https://eastleighvoice.co.ke/treasury/118529/how-foreign-affairs-budget-increased-to-fund-raila-s-failed-au-bid--treasury> (accessed: 07.03.2025)

⁴⁹ It is equally valid to argue that the agency of international organizations is heterogeneous, as is the manner in which it manifests for different states, since here, too, the determining role is played by the accumulated experience of interaction between a given state and international organizations—an experience that is unique to each country and region.

substantive reforms and the politicization of international platforms, is there a crisis of trust in international institutions among African states? Further research into these questions, in the author's view, could make it possible to introduce nuances and adjustments to the debate on international organizations—with a particular focus on countries of the developing world.

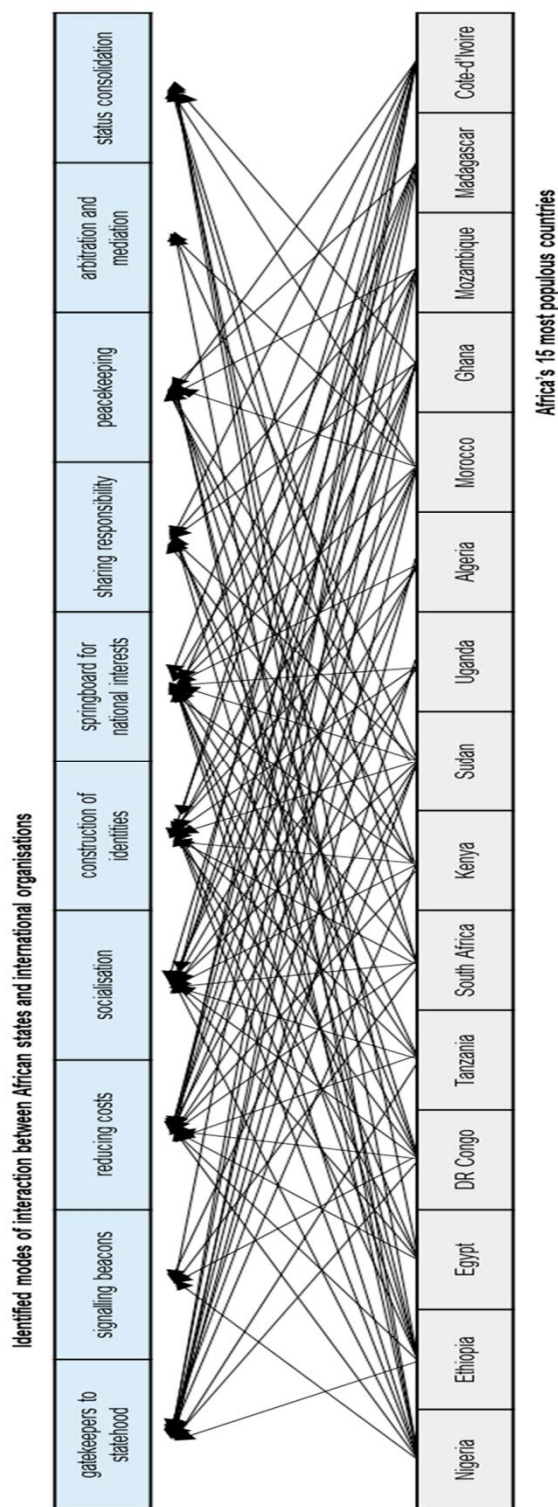


Fig. 1. Indicative correlation of interactions between African states and IOs
 Compiled by the author based on the analysis conducted in the article.

Supplementary materials to the article⁵⁰:

Appendix 1. State contributions to the financing of international organizations (distribution for 2023). Compiled by the author on the basis of data from the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (UN System CEB). URL: <https://unsceb.org/fs-revenue-government-donor>

Appendix 2. Contributions of African states to the financing of international organizations (distribution for 2023). Compiled by the author on the basis of data from the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (UN System CEB). URL: <https://unsceb.org/fs-revenue-government-donor>

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Научная статья

МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ И ВНЕШНЯЯ ПОЛИТИКА ГОСУДАРСТВ АФРИКИ ЮЖНЕЕ САХАРЫ: КОНЦЕПТУАЛИЗАЦИЯ РОЛЕЙ И ВЗАИМОЗАВИСИМОСТЕЙ

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Аннотация. Изучение международных организаций оформилось в самостоятельное направление в науке о международных отношениях. Академическая дискуссия ведется по самым разным направлениям – от процедур принятия решений и оценки эффективности до изучения агентности, реформ, автономии бюрократии, миротворческого потенциала и доступа к ключевым постам. Значительно меньшее внимание в литературе уделяется многообразию ролей, которые эти организации способны играть в реализации внешнеполитических стратегий государств Глобального Юга, порождая сложные взаимосвязи между национальными акторами и международными институтами. Данная статья стремится восполнить этот пробел, помещая в африканский контекст теоретические послы институциональных взаимодействий стран с органами системы ООН, «клубными форматами» (БРИКС, G20), специализированными (ВОЗ, ФАО) и региональными (Афросоюз, африканские региональные экономические сообщества) сообществами. Систематизируя существующие подходы к анализу взаимодействий между государствами и международными структурами, автор выделяет десять вариаций взаимодействия с ними стран Африки. Хотя большинство государств проявляют интерес к ним для усиления своих дипломатических возможностей, используют их для подачи сигналов, как площадку социализации и декларирования идентичности, а также как механизм содействия целям

развития, конкретное наполнение такого рода взаимодействий остается индивидуализированным для каждой пары «государство – организация». Данная работа, кроме того, выделяет политические амбиции отдельных стран региона и их стремление закрепить за собой лидерский статус в глаза международного сообщества. Статья уточняет представления о практиках внешней политики стран Африки в рамках международных организаций и формулирует новые исследовательские вопросы.

Ключевые слова: международные организации, мультилатерализм, Африка, ООН, Африканский союз, многостороннее сотрудничество, повестка развития, национальные интересы, миротворчество, интеграция, глобальное управление

Конфликт интересов: автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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REASSESSING NIGERIA'S HEGEMONIC STATUS IN AFRICA: FACTORS, DISCOURSE AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract. The debate surrounding the hegemonic status of powerful African nations provides the context for this study, which re-evaluates Nigeria's hegemonic status. Nigeria's evolution from traditional humanitarian intervention to aligning with the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine suggests a willingness to act as a stabilizing force in an unstable region.

This role is a pressing regional concern and a matter of global interest. Essentially, the consolidation of a legitimate African hegemon could address regional instability and release substantial international humanitarian resources dedicated to the continent.

The debate between proponents and opponents of Nigeria's hegemony hinges on its historic commitment to peacekeeping and mounting domestic challenges. Using the Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST), this reviews the arguments around Nigeria's hegemonic status. It draws on qualitative data from secondary sources and primary data from in-depth interviews with key informants from specialized agencies.

The findings show that Nigeria's commitment to regional stability through peacekeeping stems from its Afrocentric foreign policy and self-imposed sense of 'manifest destiny', but these efforts alone do not confirm hegemonic status. While Nigeria exhibits a measure of normative leadership expected of a hegemon, domestic pressures undermine its capacity to fully embody the role of a hegemon.

The study concludes that Nigeria performs a 'quasi-hegemonic' function that has contributed to relative stability especially in West Africa. However, diminishing domestic capacities required for sustained regional leadership presents a significant constraint on Nigeria's transformation into an effective African hegemon with critical implications for regional stability and international humanitarian financing.

Keywords: Nigeria, hegemony, humanitarian intervention, R2P, peacekeeping, Afrocentric foreign policy

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INTRODUCTION

The question of hegemonic stability in Africa remains a pivotal issue in international relations, with Nigeria's role constituting a central point of contention. This hegemonic discourse is rooted in the intractable problem of instability Africa has struggled with since the 1960s and the critical leadership role hegemons play in the attainment of regional order [Nye 2004]. This study is hinged on the argument that the lack of an effective hegemon in Africa plays a critical role in the intractable conflicts and instability crippling the continent. As such, the emergence of a true African hegemon is not merely an academic exercise but carries far-reaching implications for regional stability, economic development, international security, and allocation of global humanitarian resources. This is particularly important, given that the African continent consumes a significant proportion of these resources annually.

Nigeria, among several African countries, has the potential to become a regional hegemon to provide the crucial stability the continent requires for development. This potential is based on factors that include its immense human, natural, and financial resources derived from crude oil, as well as its relative military strength [Ojatorotu, Adeleke 2018]. By virtue of its natural endowments, many of the less endowed African countries expect Nigeria to assume a leadership role on the continent [Annan 2004]. Then there is also Nigeria's adoption of an "Afrocentric" foreign policy philosophy, by which it perceives itself as a leader and "big brother" on the African continent [Oshewolo et al. 2024]. This has compelled it to pursue numerous humanitarian engagements across the continent dating back to the 1960s, in the form of financial grants, conflict prevention, mitigation and resolution, and peacekeeping [Oshewolo 2019; Ugwu 2019].

Nigeria's contribution to humanitarian intervention and peacekeeping and their impact on regional peace is recognized internationally [Mickler, Suleiman, Maianga 2019]. Yet, Nigeria's status as regional hegemon is the subject of polarizing debate. Proponents of Nigeria's hegemonic status cite Nigeria's extensive and costly contribution to peacekeeping across the African continent [Adebajo 2018]. Proponents point further to Nigeria's pivotal role in the development of regional frameworks, like the Economic Community of West African States aimed at regional development (ECOWAS) [Oshewolo et al. 2024].

Skeptics, on the other hand, argue that despite the international recognition of Nigeria's peacekeeping record; its huge population, large economy, and human resources; its military, which is equal in numerical strength to that of all West African nations combined; as well as its vanguard role in the formation and funding of regional peacekeeping outfits like ECOMOG in multiple West African nations, including Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Cote d'Ivoire, the country nonetheless lacks the military, economic, and international support to be designated as the regional hegemon [Ojakorotu, Adeleke 2018].

Yet, despite its phenomenal endowments and achievements, it can at best be described as an important regional power because domestic contradictions, such as endemic poverty amidst plenty; pervasive insecurity despite its formidable military; a lack of social cohesion amidst diversity; bad governance and corruption; a negative international image; and diminishing continental influence, hinder it from the role of a legitimate hegemon [Adebajo, Mustapha 2008; Ogunnubi, Okeke-Uzodike 2016]

A different perspective is that Nigeria's foreign policy harbors no intents of international domination [Ogunnubi, Okeke-Uzodike 2016]. Its driving goal is genuine liberation and development of the continent, even at great national cost [Adebajo 2018; Adebajo, Mustapha 2008; Gambari 2018]. This altruistic foreign policy implies that claims or arguments of regional hegemony, whether real or assumed, do not align with Nigeria's Afrocentric philosophy, which adopts Africa as the centerpiece of its foreign policy [Ogunnubi 2017; Omaamaka, Okechukwu 2020].

Considering the above argumentations, what only a few studies have attempted [Ogunnubi 2017] is an analysis of the problem within an adequate theoretical framework. Therefore, this study is drawing heavily on Nigeria's legacy of regional interventionism, acknowledging the evolution from traditional humanitarian intervention to Responsibility to Protect (R2P) as the basis for re-evaluating Nigeria's hegemonic status within the theoretical framework of the "Hegemonic Stability Theory" (HST). The study focuses on Nigeria's years of regional intervention because it provides the strongest argument for Nigeria's hegemony with the aim of evaluating how well it holds up against counter-positions within the HST framework. This article contends that determining Nigeria's hegemonic status can provide critical insight into which aspects of its internal politics and foreign policy it needs to work on in order to transform into a legitimate stabilizing actor in Africa.

The above raises the central question of whether Nigeria's peacekeeping behavior translates into the stabilizing regional leadership expected of a hegemon. To do this, the study adopted a qualitative research design that combines secondary data with in-depth interviews with diplomats and experts in Nigerian foreign policy. Process tracing was employed to examine the causal mechanism that links Nigeria's foreign policy behavior to its perceived regional leadership role. This method helps to reveal the causal relationship through an analysis of individual cases, which, in turn, allows us to understand how decisions, capabilities, and outcomes measure against the expectations of HST.

HEGEMONIC STABILITY THEORY DEFINITION OF HEGEMON

The Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST), at its core, assumes that international system stability depends on the presence of a dominant state that has both the capacity and

willingness to provide leadership by making and enforcing rules for the system [Danner, Martín 2019]. HST provides a useful way to evaluate whether Nigeria's regional behavior aligns with what is expected of a hegemon. In this study, Nigeria is examined as a potential hegemon within Africa. The analysis focuses on core HST criteria:

1. Provision of Public Goods: A hegemon supplies collective goods that benefit the entire system even without direct reciprocity [Kindleberger 1986]. The public goods, in this context, encompass security goods, economic goods, and crisis prevention and management [Keohane 1984];

2. Power Resources or Capabilities: A hegemon possesses preponderance in material and ideological resources [Nye 2004]. These encompass (a) material power (which asks whether Nigeria possesses the economic, human, and military resources to enforce order and support regional stability) and (b) soft power (inquiring into whether Nigeria has cultural influence, diplomatic clout, and a normative leadership record);

3. Leadership and Willingness: A hegemon willingly bears the costs and responsibilities of leadership¹. Accordingly, does Nigeria (a) have a consistent outward-looking foreign policy doctrine that aligns with the functions of a hegemon, (b) demonstrate willingness to incur short-term economic or political costs for long-term stability, and (c) take responsibility for regional security through peacekeeping, diplomacy, and humanitarian intervention?

4. Recognition and Legitimacy: A hegemon is acknowledged and accepted by other states within the system [Clark 2011]. Do other states in the region accept Nigeria's leadership role as opposed to resisting or challenging it?

5. Stability Outcomes: The dominant state's actions must translate into stability for it to be a hegemon [Katzenstein 1977]. Accordingly, (a) has Nigeria's involvement in humanitarian interventionism resulted in a measurable decrease in interstate and intrastate conflicts in Africa, and (b) do regional and subregional organizations like ECOWAS and AU function more effectively because of Nigeria's leadership and resources?

By assessing Nigeria's humanitarian intervention efforts, foreign policy commitments, and outcomes in key security interventions through these criteria, the study systematically re-evaluates the central argument of the study regarding Nigeria's hegemonic status.

AFROCENTRISM AS BASIS FOR NIGERIA'S REGIONAL ENGAGEMENTS

Nigeria's foreign policy is built on core principles of equality and respect of the sovereign equality, territorial integrity of all African states and the pursuit of regional cooperation and unity [Ogunnubi, Isike 2018]. To practicalize these principles, Nigeria's leaders adopted Afrocentrism as the basis of its foreign policy based on notions of a "manifest destiny" to lead Africa. Manifest destiny in Nigeria's foreign policy context is different from, for example, the US context. The American foreign policy context encapsulates the conviction of the 19th century American settlers that it was their God-

¹ Habib A., Landsberg C. Hegemon or Pivot? Debating South Africa's Role in Africa. *Centre for Policy Studies*. 2003. <https://sarpn.org/documents/d0000620/P611-Pivotalstate.pdf> (accessed: 28.10.2025)

given destiny to manifest democratic republicanism across North America through continental expansionism [Dobson 2013].

In contrast, Nigeria's manifest destiny is not driven by expansionism. Rather, it encapsulates Nigeria's adopted commitment to liberate Africa from foreign domination using its significant resource capabilities. On the heels of Independence, Nigeria's Prime Minister Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, in his inaugural address at the United Nations General Assembly in October, 1960, affirmed that Nigeria wanted friendliness with all nations and had no "expansionist intentions."² This declaration resonates with Articles 1(2) and 2(4) of the UN Charter, which emphasize, respectively, "friendly relations among nations" and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states.³

Nigeria's manifest destiny aimed to prevent the exploitation of the peoples of Africa, as Nigerian leaders defined Africa's complete freedom from foreign or internal domination as Nigeria's interest [Warner 2016]. By implication, its Afrocentric foreign policy required that it had to encourage, rather than demand, the cooperation of other African countries in the struggle for continental liberation and development [Oshewolo 2019].

Afrocentrism appealed to the pioneers of Nigeria's foreign policy because it emerged as a framework for asserting the African identity [Smedley, Smedley 2018]. It contends Africans must write their own history and put themselves at the center of their own narratives as a necessary action to recapture historical spaces [Bekerie 2007] and break from Eurocentric narratives that rationalize inhumanities like slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism [Asante 2020]. Afrocentrism perceives all peoples of African descent as one community, contending that, despite their diversity, they shared the value of communal living, around which they erected economic systems of social welfarism that upheld equity, dignity, and freedom of the human person [Adeleke 2015]. Afrocentrism thus fits Nigeria's perception of the oneness of African peoples and the need to look out for each other. This set the philosophy of Nigeria's altruistic foreign policy in the continent's delayed race to self-actualization.

NIGERIA'S HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTIONISM THROUGH THE HEGEMONIC STABILITY THEORY

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has provided different public goods to less powerful African states. It offered direct financial and material aid to many indigent newly independent African states [Fawole 2000]. Through a Technical Aids Corp (TAC), established in 1987, Nigeria deployed thousands of professionals to support education, training, and mentorship across Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific [Ogunnubi, Isike 2018; Onuoha, Onuoha 2022]. Additionally, Nigeria financed development projects in 17 Sub-Saharan African countries via a trust fund through the African Development Bank, totaling \$240 million by 1990 [Bukarambe 2000].

² Maiden General Assembly Statement at the United Nations. 07.10.1960. *Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the United Nations*. <http://nigeriaunmission.org/maiden-speech-at-the-un/> (accessed: 17.11.2025)

³ Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice. *United Nations. 1945*. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf> (accessed: 17.11.2025)

Nigeria's has provided substantial moral and financial support to regional organizations. It was instrumental in forming the OAU/AU and ECOWAS, and Nigeria has consistently funded them beyond its legal obligations. It covered up to 10% of OAU's annual budget [Bukarambe 2000] and up to 75% of ECOWAS' annual funding. Through these platforms, Nigeria led and participated in numerous peacekeeping missions across Africa [Mbara, Gopal 2020]. Its efforts began with the 1960–1964 UN operation in Congo, where it contributed 1,796 soldiers and police officers and helped broker the peace deal that ended the conflict [Gambari 2012]. Recently, it has shouldered responsibility for the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) put together to combat Boko Haram⁴ in the Lake Chad Basin.

Nigeria has taken lead roles in the creation of numerous conflict prevention and mitigation frameworks, such as the “Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development in Africa” (1997–1999);⁵ Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance of Defence (1981)⁶; ECOWAS Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security (1999)⁷; ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001);⁸ the AU Constitutive Act (2000)⁹; and support for the R2P doctrine and the AU's shift from non-interference to non-indifference. This shift signalled Nigeria's willingness to commit to armed intervention for the protection of vulnerable populations within the territory of sovereign states. Nigeria's commitment to R2P and non-indifference as new humanitarian philosophies is also linked to the dominance of its military capacity in Sub-Saharan Africa [Ojatorotu, Adeleke 2018].

Within HST, a hegemon enjoys legitimacy through acceptance of its leadership by other states. While the above suggests Nigeria has generated significant public goods for many African states, statistics show that SSA perpetually ranks below the global average of nearly every development index, including poverty and all the dimensions of human security¹⁰. Nigeria, because of its predominant population, has one of the highest poverty rates in Africa. Up to 63% of Nigeria's total population suffer multidimensional

⁴ Recognized as a terrorist organization in Nigeria, the USA, EU, and by the UN Security Council.

⁵ Program for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development in Africa (PCASED). *Federation of American Scientists*. 1999. <https://nuke.fas.org/control/pcased/index.html> (accessed: 30.10.2025)

⁶ Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance in Defence. ECOWAS. 1981. *Amani Africa*. <https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Protocol-Relating-to-Mutual-Assistance-in-Defence-1981.pdf> (accessed: 30.10.2025)

⁷ Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace– Keeping and Security. ECOWAS. 1999. *Amani Africa*. <https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Protocol-Relating-to-the-Mechanism-for-Conflict-Prevention-Management-Resolution-Peace-Keeping-and-Security-1999.pdf> (accessed: 30.10.2025)

⁸ Protocol A/SPI/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance. Supplementary to the Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security. ECOWAS. 2001. *EISA*. <https://www.eisa.org/pdf/ecowas2001protocol.pdf> (accessed: 30.10.2025)

⁹ Constitutive Act of the African Union. *AU*. 2000. https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/34873-file-constitutiveact_en.pdf

¹⁰ See: Wadhawa B. Year in Review: 2018 in 14 Charts. *World Bank Group*. 21.12.2018. <https://worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2018/12/21/year-in-review-2018-in-14-charts> (accessed: 30.10.2025), Schoch M., Lakner C., African countries show mixed progress towards poverty reduction and half of them have an extreme poverty rate above 35%. *World Bank Blogs*. 22.12.2020. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/african-countries-show-mixed-progress-towards-poverty-reduction-and-half-them-have-extreme> (accessed: 30.10.2025)

poverty¹¹. Despite Nigeria's support for regional economic integration through frameworks like ECOWAS and the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), the tendency is for the economies of African countries to be externally oriented, making trade more likely with countries in Europe, North America, and Asia than with each other [Ake 1996]. This suggests that Nigeria has neither been able to generate the level of collective goods that translate into prosperity nor the economic momentum to stabilize Africa as a distinct international economic system fuelled by Nigeria's own large market.

Despite claims of manifest destiny, Nigeria's role of regional leader faces increasing resistance even by countries that have benefited from Nigeria's public goods, generated often at great diplomatic and economic cost. Researchers note that Nigeria's decolonization campaign, which was key to the independence of many countries, including Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe, Rhodesia, Namibia, and South Africa, strained diplomatic relations with western allies [Ogunsanwo 2010]. To protest Britain's unwillingness to condemn white minority rule in Rhodesia, Nigeria nationalized the assets of British Petroleum in 1978 [Osuntokun 2008]. Nigeria lost US \$45 billion over a 15-year period enforcing an embargo on crude oil exports to apartheid South Africa [Garba 1987]. Sources claim Nigeria expended up to \$1 billion in financial aid and support for the liberation struggle in Southern Africa [Oluwafunminiyi 2021]. Other estimates put Nigeria's financial aid to countries in Africa, the Pacific, and the Caribbean at tens of billions of US \$ [Fawole 2000]. Countries that benefitted from TAC do not reciprocate when it matters¹².

This lack of reciprocity manifests often as votes against Nigeria's interest at international forums. In 1995, close neighbors and other African countries voted against Nigeria's candidate for President of the African Development Bank [Mbara, Gopal 2020]. South Africa, Egypt, whom Nigeria supported during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and Ghana, whose responsibility to supply electricity to Togo and Benin is shouldered by Nigeria through the supply of fossil fuel (natural gas), did not support Nigeria's bid for a permanent UN Security Council seat. In 2009, Togo, which receives the bulk of its electricity supply from Nigeria, and Sierra Leone and Liberia, where Nigeria spent over US \$8 billion to end civil wars, did not support Nigeria when it sought a non-permanent UNSC seat [Akinterinwa 2012].

HINDRANCES TO STABILITY OUTCOMES OF NIGERIA'S HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION IN AFRICA

The foregoing highlights Nigeria's extensive and expensive humanitarian intervention in Africa. It also centralizes Nigeria's inability to translate its intervention *bona fides* into influence to serve its national interest. This is also evident in the levels of discrimination Nigerian citizens face in other African countries. In South Africa, for

¹¹ Nigeria's Multidimensional Poverty Index. *National Bureau of Statistics*. 2022. <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/elibrary/read/1241254> (accessed: 30.10.2025)

¹² Adebani W. Globally Oriented Citizenship and International Voluntary Service: Interrogating Nigeria's Technical Aid Corp Scheme. *Nordic Africa Institute*. 19.01.2012. <https://coilink.org/20.500.12592/4w7f6g> (accessed: 28.11.2025)

example, Nigerians are constant victims of xenophobia [Mbara, Gopal 2020; Ogunnowo, Joshua 2019]. Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy has not yielded the benefits that, according to HST, flow from hegemony. Perceptions among Africans that Nigerians are loud and disrespectful intensify resistance against notions of Nigerian hegemony [Warner 2017].

Additionally, Nigeria's 60-year history of interventionism has not produced expected stability outcomes. Despite the provision of peacekeeping goods, Sub-Saharan Africa remains one of the most unstable regions in the world [Mickler, Suleiman, Maiangwa 2019]. Without disregard for Nigeria's potential to be a regional hegemon, those who deny it its putative status rely on the myriad of domestic issues that constrain its potential [Adebajo, Landsberg 2003; Herbst 2015].

CREDIBILITY CRISIS

In an ideal case, a hegemon derives its power from a relatively stable domestic environment, from which it projects power and dominance into the international system. Yet Nigeria has a history of persistent instability observable in various incidents—from the 1966 12-day insurgency of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, the 30-month civil war of 1967, the bloody Maitatsine Revolts of the 1980s, and the Niger Delta militancy to the agitations of secessionist groups like IPOB in the southeast region, the protracted Boko Haram insurgency, widespread banditry, and kidnapping for ransom. Though it is argued the security challenge does not diminish Nigeria's commitment to regional stability [Adebajo 2018], it has damaging implications for its international reputation [Ojatorotu, Adeleke 2018].

Thus, while Nigeria continues to affirm support for regional peace architectures like the AU Constitutive Act, the ECOWAS Protocols mentioned above, and the R2P doctrine, preoccupation with domestic insecurity, including terrorism, insurgencies, banditry, and farmer-herder clashes, increasingly reduces its attention to regional peacekeeping [Ogunnubi 2018].

Additionally, stagnation, recession, and inflation have emerged as economic problems that have forced successive regimes to divert humanitarian intervention resources towards domestic necessities. This study has highlighted the capital-intensive nature of Nigeria's humanitarian projects. Nigeria's 2013 Mali peacekeeping mission cost \$34 million, excluding financial costs of post-conflict engagement [Adigbuo 2022]. The pervasive nature and extensive economic and military resources required to combat domestic insecurity have strained Nigeria's capacity to commit increasingly scarce resources to the objective of regional stability, creating a credibility crisis for the country¹³.

Another fuel for the credibility crisis facing Nigeria is endemic corruption. While huge sums are reportedly earmarked for the pursuit of Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy, there are accusations of misappropriation of public funds under the guise of national security, regional peacekeeping, humanitarian intervention, and socio-economic

¹³ Interviews with RtoP expert (07.08.2024, South Africa), AU Experts (13.02.2024, Abuja), and ex-diplomats (22.05.2024, Lagos).

development of the African region [Mbara, Gopal 2020]. As there are sketchy records for the exact monies spent, Nigeria's legacy of Afrocentric philanthropy has been tainted by suspicions of being a conduit for misappropriating public funds. Countries like South Africa suppress or downplay the history of Nigeria's aid and assistance during its struggle against apartheid to create distance between itself and Nigeria's reputation for official corruption.

LEADERSHIP DEFICIT AND FOREIGN POLICY INCONSISTENCY

Though it is taken for granted that Nigeria's foreign policy is guided by Afrocentrism, an interrogation of its focus over the years, particularly since the transition to civilian rule in 1999, shows varying priorities depending on political cycles. The Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo (1999–2007) and his successors, particularly the President Goodluck Jonathan (2009–2015), focused on positioning Nigeria as the dominant regional player in Sub-Saharan Africa [Ilemona 2020; Tsuwa 2022]. Their shuttle diplomacy and numerous international engagements were enabled by favorable economic circumstances, including adequate revenue from high crude oil prices. The combination of strong international support, personal priorities, and relative abundance of financial resources meant Nigeria could take seriously its Afrocentric mandate in peacekeeping.

Declining economic fortunes compelled subsequent presidents to take a different approach to regional peace and politics. President Muhammadu Buhari (2015–2023) largely avoided peacekeeping commitments and pursued protectionist policies like border closures, bans on selected imported products, and delaying ratification of regional trade liberalization frameworks like AfCFTA¹⁴. Incumbent President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has cleared Nigeria's outstanding financial commitments to ECOWAS and confronted issues like the military coup in Niger with sanctions and threats of military intervention to force a return to civilian rule. Nonetheless, these proclamations did not translate to intervention, as sanctions have been lifted without achieving the intended effect.¹⁵ Necessarily, their focus has been on internal economic reforms and shuttle diplomacy to attract Foreign Direct Investment, combating domestic insecurity and politicking to consolidate his position in preparation for election in 2027.

This has led to inconsistency in the application of Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy since 1999. The seeming withdrawal of Nigeria from its leadership role has allowed "much smaller African countries to speak on behalf of the continent" and take on significant responsibilities in international affairs [Gambari 2012: 57]. This position lines up with expert opinions that Nigeria's inconsistent leadership in recent times fuels a

¹⁴ Nwafuru P. AfCFTA: The underlying principles, objectives and benefits. *Nairametrics*. 03.03.2021. <https://nairametrics.com/2021/03/03/afcfta-the-underlying-principles-objectives-and-benefits/> (accessed: 29.10.2025)

¹⁵ Mansur A. Bola Tinubu's U-Turn on Niger sanctions received with relief in northern Nigeria. *BBC*. 16.03.2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68563579> (accessed: 30.10.2025)

legitimacy and credibility crisis confronting the country despite previous peacekeeping efforts¹⁶.

EMERGING AFRICAN POWERS

Nigeria's regional leadership deficit, inconsistent foreign policy prioritizing, particularly isolationism and focus on internal struggles as opposed to HST prescriptions of openness and outward orientation, coupled with the credibility crisis, have advanced the nosedive of Nigeria's international reputation. The "smaller African countries" with rising international profiles like South Africa, Ghana, Egypt, and Kenya stepping into the gap are becoming prominent voices for global security and regional peace in international spaces [Ogunnubi 2017]. While Nigeria has traditionally dominated mobilization of financial and human resources for peacekeeping in Africa, these "smaller African countries" with more "relative domestic stability" are willing to serve in similar roles and arguably "doing better than Nigeria in UN-mounted peacekeeping operations" [Oshewolo et al. 2024: 94]. The willingness of these countries suggests that perceptions of Nigeria as Africa's dominant leader are changing.

Among other factors that challenge arguments of Nigeria's status as regional hegemon or dominant power is the entrenched presence of external powers like France in the region. Besides maintaining strong political and economic influence over all its former colonies (many of which are countries in West Africa, Nigeria's supposed primary sphere of influence), France has also assumed responsibility for security, particularly counterinsurgency and counterterrorism in Francophone West Africa [Charbonneau 2021]. This points to the limited reach of Nigeria's influence in West Africa. It has also been suggested that undermining regional stability [Kuperman 2013] and Nigeria's ability to function in the role of regional hegemon is essential to France's strategy of protecting its strategic interests in West Africa¹⁷.

A core argument to support the theory that this destabilization is a part of France's long-term strategy for Africa draws heavily from the events leading up to the 2011 Libyan intervention. Prior to the Arab uprising, which triggered the intervention, Libya was one of Africa's most developed countries, with social development indices comparable to the European Union¹⁸. However, decades of the US and UN sanctions, coupled with rising disaffection with the dictatorship of Muammar Gaddafi and fluctuation in international crude oil pricing, negatively impacted the ability of the regime to sustain extensive social welfare essential to the stability of the Libyan state [Pradella, Taghdisi 2017]. This triggered a popular revolt in 2011 demanding reform and the dismantling of the dictatorship [Hove 2017].

A National Transitional Council (NTC) formed by protesters gained and received quick international support. Nigeria stood for the protection of civilians as protests

¹⁶ Interview with ECOWAS Official (13.02.2024, Abuja), AU Expert (13.02.2024, Abuja) and Nigeria Ambassador to the UN (18.02.2024, Abuja).

¹⁷ Interview with retired Ambassadors (03.08.2023, Lagos), Head of Nigeria Mission (03.08.2023, Lagos) and NIIA Official (06.06.2023, Lagos)

¹⁸ Omojowo A. Post-Gaddafi: Libyan Paradise Turns to Hell. *The Organization for World Peace*. 30.06.2016. <https://theowp.org/reports/post-gaddafi-libyan-paradise-turns-to-hell/> (accessed: 01.11.2025)

escalated and advocated for a diplomatic solution emphasizing political reforms [De Waal 2013]. While it was open to armed intervention as a last resort for civilian protection [Erameh 2018], it unequivocally rejected any form of external military intervention [De Waal, 2013].

Regardless, France spearheaded a NATO intervention, which experts concur was instrumental to the descent of Libya into chaos and civil war [Chesterman 2011; Kuperman 2019]. It was suggested that Gaddafi had denied France access to Libya's lucrative energy sector; thus, Gaddafi's removal was necessary to gain access, and evidence points to France striking energy deals with the NTC even before mass atrocity became a clear concern [Kuperman 2013]. Therefore, France's interference was a crucial factor for the escalation of the conflict.

Nigeria ultimately recognized the NTC as Libya's legitimate government and voted in support of UNSC Resolution 1973 authorizing the use of all necessary measures, including armed intervention, to protect civilians. While this marked the first operational use of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, Nigeria, despite its aversion to external intervention, did not demonstrate the political leadership or will necessary to take effective control of the situation.

Libya presently is a hotbed for transnational criminality, particularly human and arms smuggling and trafficking, as well as terrorism and the further destabilization of Sub-Saharan Africa¹⁹. By extension, the endemic instability in Libya and the growing insurgent violence destabilizing West African countries like Mali (and Nigeria) are failures of Nigeria to provide effective regional leadership when it was needed.

Apart from the pervasive influence of external forces on the continent, the post-conflict outcomes of recent Nigeria-backed interventions have not strengthened the country's self-perception as a dominant regional power. The cases of Côte d'Ivoire and Mali, two West African countries, buttress this. In Côte d'Ivoire, despite Nigeria's calls for restraint and respect for the will of the people in the wake of elections in 2011, the then president, Laurent Gbagbo refused to accept defeat. Disregarding Nigeria's admonitions and threats, he took actions that triggered a humanitarian crisis requiring intervention to address [Erameh, Ologe 2021].

Despite invoking seminal regional peace frameworks like the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001) to mediate several rounds of negotiation, Nigeria as the dominant regional power did not demonstrate effectual leadership, allowing France to lead an international intervention force under UNSC Resolution 1975 to remove Gbagbo—although the intervention force was populated by the ECOWAS Standby Force led by Nigeria, which contributed to halting the violence. However, in the following years, Cote d'Ivoire has faced new electoral violence that constantly threatens stability in the country²⁰.

¹⁹ Eaton T. How conflict in Libya facilitated transnational expansion of migrant smuggling and trafficking. *Chatham House*. 21.2.2025. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/02/how-conflict-libya-facilitated-transnational-expansion-migrant-smuggling-and-trafficking> (accessed: 30.10.2025)

²⁰ Cote d'Ivoire: Populations at risk. *Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect*. 02.04.2022. <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/cote-divoire/> (accessed: 31.10.2025)

In Mali, the return of well-armed Tuareg fighters from Libya following the collapse of Gaddafi's regime triggered a rebel insurgency that led to the occupation of key towns in the northern and central regions of the country, after dislodging other armed groups previously occupying these locations [Erameh, Ojakorotu, Obor 2021]. Following an emergency summit in Abuja, ECOWAS resolved to send 3,000 troops to support 6,000 Malian troops to recover occupied territories²¹. Under the backing of UNSC Resolution 2085, Nigeria contributed 1,200 troops to the peacekeeping mission in Mali²². In the post-peacekeeping periods, persistent instability has enabled multiple successful military coups since 2020²³. Indeed, the recent exit of Mali from ECOWAS was blamed on the inability of regional actors like Nigeria and ECOWAS to provide them with the support required to tackle insecurity and free themselves from the domination of France [Ologe, Erameh 2025].

Within the HST framework, the continued influence of France, whether real or perceived, and the controversial outcome of interventions by Nigeria, most notably, the persistence of instability and violence, delegitimized Nigeria in the estimation of emerging African powers, despite historic commitment to decolonization and past intervention successes in places like Liberia and Sierra Leone. Also, less powerful West African states, particularly Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, signed a new mutual defense pact outside of ECOWAS and the putative protection provided by Nigeria [Ologe, Erameh 2025]. These events strengthen growing regional resistance to perceptions of Nigeria's dominance. They are rooted in the desire of more African states to assert their sovereignty in the face of massive human rights violations, making it increasingly difficult for Nigeria to act in protection of vulnerable populations [Wimmer, Miner 2020].

This difficulty was a major motivation for Nigeria's eager support for the AU's shift from the founding principle of "non-interference" to "non-indifference" under the AU constitutive act and the UN-backed norm of R2P. Both concepts create legal international pathways for Nigeria to continue its tradition of humanitarian interventionism. However, as shown above, Nigeria's peacekeeping success in recent years has been mixed. Countries where Nigeria supported or participated in intervention have either become worse, like Libya, or relapsed into constant or intermittent violence and instability, like Mali and Cote d'Ivoire.

DOMESTIC RESISTANCE

Besides regional resistance to Nigeria's dominance, Nigerians are increasingly opposed to their country's Afrocentric foreign policy. This resistance to Nigeria's idea of manifest destiny stems from local perceptions of neglect by the Nigerian state to focus on

²¹ Callimachi R. ECOWAS to send troops to Mali. *Global Policy Forum*. 12.11.2012. <https://archive.globalpolicy.org/humanitarian-intervention/52048-ecowas-to-send-troops-to-mali.html%3Fitemid=id.html> (accessed: 30.10.2025)

²² Campbell J. Nigeria's Role in the Mali Intervention. *Council on Foreign Relations*. 25.01.2013. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/nigerias-role-mali-intervention> (accessed: 30.10.2025)

²³ Mali, a Coup within a Coup. *Crisis Group*. 27.05.2021. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/mali/mali-coup-within-coup> (accessed: 30.10.2025)

the development challenges of other countries without commensurate benefits to show for it, coupled with the worsening of its credibility, image, and legitimacy crisis [Mailafia 2010].

Accordingly, concerned local stakeholders argue for a shift from Nigeria's Africa-centered foreign policy, on account of its internal struggles, towards one that focuses on the Nigerian citizen and national interest defined in realist terms [Mbara, Gopal 2020; Oshewolo 2019; Ogunnowo, Joshua 2019]. Others contend that Nigeria retains the Afrocentric motivation but reforms it in such a way that it actively serves the interests of Nigerians [Amao, Okeke-Uzodike 2015; Egbe, Ushie 2022; Usman, Obiyan 2017].

Thus, despite arguments asserting Nigeria's hegemony, Nigerians at home increasingly support that Nigeria focus more on its own challenges. It is recognized that genuine governance reforms can transform Nigeria into Africa's first superpower [Cilliers, Schunemann, Moyer 2015]. Yet while these challenges persist, though Nigeria remains undeniably a powerful regional actor, it will lack the influence and dominance within the HST framework to lay claim to or be designated as a hegemon [Ogunnubi, Okeke-Uzodike 2016; Ojakorotu, Adeleke 2017].

CONCLUSION

This paper began with the thesis that the unsettled debate around Nigeria's hegemonic status in Africa has implications for the region's stability, economic development, international security, and the allocation of global humanitarian resources. The paper thus examined the question of Nigeria's hegemony, focusing on its robust history of humanitarian intervention and peacekeeping.

The study acknowledged that Nigeria possesses core attributes, such as a formidable military power and a large economy that can mimic hegemonic posture. However, a range of entrenched domestic challenges, encompassing insecurity, corruption, and economic recession, interact to deny it the legitimacy required for full hegemony. Furthermore, the underdevelopment and persistent political instability that define West Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa in general demonstrate that Nigeria's interventionism has not yet translated into system-wide stability.

Therefore, when assessed against the study's adopted framework of the Hegemonic Stability theory, which prioritizes capacity and stability outcomes over intent, Nigeria cannot be classified as a *bona fide* regional hegemon. Its significant contributions to regional peacekeeping, while substantial, are not sufficient to overcome this deficit. Nonetheless, Nigeria's Afrocentric interventionism strongly points to a critical "quasi-hegemonic" function on the basis that it provides selective public goods like security mediation and financial aid without the comprehensive economic or ideological leadership of a true hegemon.

The country has been instrumental in ending or preventing violent conflicts across Africa, making significant contributions to the relative peace enjoyed in several countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone. Nigeria's potential to ascend to a hegemonic power status is contingent upon its ability to implement genuine internal reforms that stabilize its domestic affairs and rehabilitate its international image and credibility. Until then, its role

is best described not as a hegemon but as an indispensable, quasi-hegemonic actor in the African security landscape.

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ПЕРЕОЦЕНКА ГЕГЕМОНИСТСКОГО СТАТУСА НИГЕРИИ В АФРИКЕ: ФАКТОРЫ, ДИСКУРС, ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

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Аннотация. В основе данного исследования лежат дискуссии о гегемонистском статусе ведущих африканских государств, в частности, о переосмыслении и переоценке положения Нигерии, которая все чаще позиционирует себя в качестве стабилизирующей силы в нестабильном регионе на фоне перехода от традиционной гуманитарной интервенции к доктрине «Ответственность по защите» (*R2P*). Роль и идентичность Нигерии как регионального гегемона является насущной проблемой для региона и предметом международных дискуссий. По сути, утверждение легитимного африканского гегемона в лице Нигерии могло бы решить проблему региональной нестабильности. Дебаты между сторонниками и противниками гегемонистской позиции Нигерии вращаются вокруг ее исторической приверженности миротворчеству и растущих внутренних проблем. Используя теорию гегемонистской стабильности, статья представляет аргументы, обосновывающие нынешний статус Нигерии. Были использованы качественные данные из вторичных источников и первичные данные, полученные в ходе интервью с ключевыми экспертами из профильных структур. Результаты исследования демонстрируют, что приверженность Нигерии региональной стабильности посредством миротворческой деятельности проистекает из афроцентричного вектора ее внешней политики и чувства «особого предназначения». Однако эти усилия сами по себе не подтверждают ее статус гегемона. Хотя Нигерия демонстрирует определенную степень нормативного лидерства, ожидаемого от гегемона, недостаток внутренних ресурсов подрывает ее способность в полной мере воплощать роль гегемона. Сделан вывод о том, что Нигерия по сути выполняет «квазигегемонистскую» функцию, которая способствует достижению относительной стабильности, особенно в Западной Африке. Однако снижение внутреннего потенциала, необходимого для поддержания устойчивого регионального лидерства, представляет собой серьезное препятствие для превращения Нигерии в полноценного гегемона, что имеет критические последствия для региональной стабильности и международного гуманитарного финансирования.

Ключевые слова: Нигерия, гегемония, гуманитарная интервенция, *R2P*, миротворчество, афроцентричная внешняя политика

Персональный вклад авторов: авторы внесли равнозначный вклад в разработку проекта, проведение исследования и подготовку текста статьи.

Конфликт интересов: авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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UN AND REGIONAL ACTORS IN SOMALIA: A QUEST FOR NEW MODES OF INTERACTION

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Abstract. Over the past decades, the security situation in Somalia has been a matter of global concern. Since 1991, Somalia has remained a virtually fragmented country with de facto no proper governance. A significant part of the country's territory, with the exception of, perhaps, only the northern regions, is subject to attacks by terrorist groups, while clan-militia groups are engaged in an armed confrontation for establishing their local control. Additional security threats are related to the "culture of violence" that has formed in the country over several decades, the massive proliferation of small arms, and border conflicts over territories and access to agricultural resources. The UN, AU, and sub-regional actors have taken a number of practical actions to resolve the internal conflict in the country and establish the national institutions that the people of Somalia need so urgently. The joint work of different peacekeeping actors in Somalia has taken the form of a "partner deployment." This made it possible to use the potential of regional organizations comprehensively, by separating the ground-based "forceful" actions of the AU peacekeepers, the EU's educational missions, and financial assistance from the UN and international donors. In these processes, the UN retained overall political leadership in the conflict settlement. The joint participation of the EU's and the AU's peacekeepers in solving problems with the local security forces' capacity increasing with the support of the UN may indicate an expanded model of "partner deployment" of UN peacekeepers with the two most significant regional actors. With the rise in the number of peacekeeping actors, it seems advisable to introduce a universal system for coordinating efforts within a single operation in order to adapt peacekeeping practices to the conditions of modern internal conflicts.

Keywords: UN, AU, EU, peacekeeping, partner deployment, parallel operations

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INTRODUCTION

The complex and interrelated problems of the 21st century's internal conflicts' resolution significantly exceed the individual capabilities of any peacekeeping actors—from individual states to the United Nations (UN) as the global international institution. Therefore, to make the peace efforts more effective, more thoughtful and coordinated actions are needed, which would make it possible to mobilize the full range of the multilateral peacekeeping system methods.

Analysis of international peacekeeping practices shows that, along with the UN, regional (continental) organizations, sub-regional communities, and coalitions of states (for example, stabilization forces with security mandates) are increasingly involved in the resolving of internal conflicts, as well as UN member states or other actors invited on a bilateral basis (for example, private military or security companies).

We agree with the Russian military expert V.N. Pivovarov, who posits that “development of cooperation and joining the efforts of the UN with these actors can lead to more sustainable results, since their role in the modern world is becoming more and more noticeable” [Pivovarov 2023: 408].

At the same time, we also share the point of view of the Russian researcher of peacekeeping N.N. Dimitrov, that “the system of methods of modern peacekeeping should have complexity, i.e., the expediency of combining various means and methods in the course of a single operation; sufficient compatibility, i.e., the possibility of parallel application of various methods; a certain logical sequence involving the use of methods depending on their hierarchy or the stage of the conflict” [Dimitrov 2008: 47]. In this case, we assume that a similar universality should be applied to the peacekeeping operations subjects.

This thesis can be illustrated by the example of Africa. The development of the resource and economic potential of the continent requires the achievement of complete security, resolution and prevention of armed conflicts, and neutralization of terrorist groups along with the causes for their emergence.

Creating comprehensive models of African security capable of adapting to the terrorism-related threats and to the emergence of new “instability zones” cannot be an easy task. In some cases (for example, in Somalia), the UN has been searching for many years for new forms of cooperation with regional and sub-regional partners in order to increase the effectiveness of stabilization efforts on the ground.

Currently, the academic literature describes several forms of joint activities of the UN peacekeepers with other international actors. The most frequently noted are *sequential deployment*, in which, as a rule, the operations of regional or coalition forces are reassigned to the UN¹, and *parallel deployment*, which involves the simultaneous

¹ According to the Russian expert in international relations A.A. Rubtsova, a positive example of this form of deployment is the UN peacekeeping mission in Burundi, which “brought positive changes to the dire situation in the country” [Rubtsova 2016: 49].

operation in a country (region) of several peacekeeping actors performing similar, but not always identical, tasks.

Thus, the relevance of this article is conditioned by the necessity to analyze the forms of joint activities of peacekeeping actors in Africa, based on the needs of both individual countries, including Russia, and international organizations interested in the peaceful development of the region's states, the elimination of terrorist groups, and free access to the continent's resources and communications. This analysis can be carried out meaningfully on the example of the long-term process of the Somalia internal conflict resolution. The paper uses the method of comparative analysis and historical and system-functional approaches, which allowed us to come to reasonable conclusions.

A CRITICAL VIEW ON THE PEACEKEEPING PARTNERSHIP IN AFRICA

Currently, some UN member states do not show initiative to resolve internal conflicts in unstable states due to the emergence of new security challenges connected with countering terrorism and violent extremism and to the fear of the loss of their peacekeeping personnel. This circumstance significantly weakens the potential of the UN peacekeeping response and requires a change in the formats of field operations.

In recent years, the activities of peacekeepers have increasingly been criticized by host states' elites, public and religious leaders. The host states' authorities indicate a low effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. In some cases, it is related to a lack of local population awareness about the mandate and duration of UN missions, the capabilities of peacekeepers, the limits of intervention, and the Rules of Engagement (RoE). Misunderstanding is intensified in cases where other regional or sub-regional operations, deployed both under the UN mandate and without it or attracted on a bilateral basis, operate simultaneously with UN peacekeepers on the host state territory.

It is important to note that the development of robust peacekeeping methods increases the likelihood of blurring the boundaries between mandates for the UN peacekeeping missions and peace enforcement operations. The emergence of new complex problems of peacekeeping has actualized the improvement of interaction forms and the development of new types of missions for various situations, including military action in support of peace and stability.

These problems have become an imperative for the search for new forms of UN interaction with national and international peacekeeping actors. For example, UN Secretary-General A. Guterres, in his report "Overall Effectiveness of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations," notes that "better coordination is also required with national or regional military operations, given that over the past decade, peacekeeping operations have often operated alongside regional, subregional or ad hoc security deployments with enforcement mandates."²

In addition, the UN Secretary General in the concept paper "A New Agenda for Peace" notes that in cases where peace enforcement is required, the UN Security Council (SC) should authorize the creation of a multinational force or allow coercive actions by

² Report by the Secretary-General on the overall performance of UN peacekeeping operations. S/2023/646. UN. 01.09.2023. <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n23/248/31/pdf/n2324831.pdf> (accessed: 14.12.2025)

regional and sub-regional organizations. He also called for the creation of “a new generation of peace enforcement missions and counter-terrorism operations, led by African partners with a Security Council mandate under Chapters VII and VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, with guaranteed funding from through contributions”³.

It should be noted that in each region—and especially in Africa—the UN is trying to establish proactive partnerships outside the UN system and find the optimal form of peacekeeping intervention and force configuration, taking into account the potential of regional actors. As rightly noted by the Russian researcher of international relations S.A. Bokeria, the partnership with the African Union (AU) and sub-regional organizations provides the UN with opportunities to achieve this goal on the territory of the African continent [Bokeria 2022: 193].

UN-AU ENGAGEMENT IN SOMALIA: LESSONS AND PERSPECTIVES

The traditional threats to Somalia’s stability are weak governance, lack of social harmony due to low “culture of dialogue,” a high terrorist threat related to the radicalization of the population, and the large-scale spread of various types of weapons, as well as border conflicts over territories and access to agricultural resources [Kabandula, Shaw 2018: 3].

In 1992–1995, the UN attempted to stabilize the situation in Somalia and consistently conducted two peacekeeping operations (UNSOM-I⁴ and UNSOM-II⁵), which were curtailed and did not achieve the intended results in either the military or the humanitarian sphere [Shagalov 2005, Urnov 2022].

As a part of the internal conflict political settlement process, multilateral meetings and consultations were held to arrange a conference on national reconciliation. Even after the bloody attack by the armed formations of warlord M.F. Aidid on Pakistani peacekeepers, the staff of the small political group of the UN mission tried to establish peace through lengthy negotiations with the opposition, religious leaders, and elders [Tishkov 2011: 108]. Those efforts, unfortunately, did not lead to significant positive results. But even after the withdrawal of peacekeeping forces, the UN demonstrated

³ Our Common Agenda. Policy Brief 9. A New Agenda for Peace. *UN*. 2003. <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-for-peace-en.pdf> (accessed: 11.12.2025)

⁴ United Nations Operation in Somalia-I (UNOSOM I, April 1992 – March 1993) was established by the UN SC Resolution № 751 (1992) to monitor the ceasefire in Mogadishu and escort deliveries of humanitarian supplies to distribution centers in the city. The approved strength of the “power” block of the mission was 4,269 military and security personnel, but in fact only 947 peacekeepers were deployed. The mission faced a number of challenges related to communication, coordination, and national contingent management. UN losses amounted to 6 soldiers. See: UNOSOM I. *UN*. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/past/unosomi.htm> (accessed: 07.11.2025)

⁵ United Nations Operation in Somalia-II (UNOSOM II, March 1993 – March 1995) was approved by UN SC Resolution No. 814 (1993) to take measures, including the necessary forceful actions, in order to create a safe environment for the provision of humanitarian assistance throughout Somalia. To this end, UNOSOM II was mandated to complete, through disarmament and reconciliation, the work to restore peace, stability, law and order initiated by the *Unified Task Force* (UNITAF). The maximum approved number of military and police personnel was 28 thousand people. UN casualties amounted to 154 people, including 149 military personnel, three civilian peacekeepers and two local employees. UNOSOM II. *UN*. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/past/unosom2facts.html> (accessed: 07.11.2025)

political will and decided to maintain its presence in the country in the form of a special political mission.

In order to achieve progress in the political process, the UN SC authorized the United Nations Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS)⁶, together with regional and international donors and other stakeholders, to implement measures to support the Djibouti Peace Agreement⁷ to facilitate the coordination of international support for the reconstruction and training of the Somali Security Forces (SSF), including the armed forces, police, and justice institutions⁸.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General held the authority to coordinate all activities of the UN System in Somalia, to provide good offices and political support for the efforts to establish lasting peace and stability in Somalia, and to mobilize resources and support from the international community for both immediate recovery and long-term economic development⁹. Along with the political process support, the UN worked with different partners to develop new approaches to stabilizing the situation in Somalia, based on the division of responsibilities.

In this context, the initiative of the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) to conduct a sub-regional peacekeeping mission in Somalia (IGAD Peace Support Mission to Somalia, IGASOM)¹⁰ deserves some positive assessment. The mission was aimed at creating the conditions for the normal functioning of the national government, supporting large-scale political dialogue, and assisting Somali parties in the reform of the security forces and in demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration of combatants, as well as humanitarian operations.

Somali Islamists viewed the participation of IGAD in conflict resolution as an external intervention in support of one of the parties. This situation required political decisions at the level of the AU and the UN. In December 2006, the UN SC authorized IGAD and AU member states to establish a Protection and Training Mission in Somalia and partially lifted the embargo on arms, military equipment, technical training, and assistance intended solely to support peacekeeping forces¹¹.

In January 2007, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), given the high level of threats from Islamists, decided to deploy the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) with a mandate to support the holding of a national reconciliation congress¹². And in February

⁶ The United Nations Political Office in Somalia (UNPOS) functioned from 15.04.1995 until the expiration of its mandate on 03.06.2013.

⁷ Agreement between the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia (TFG) and the Alliance for Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS). 19.08.2008. *UN Political Office for Somalia*. https://unpos.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/old_dnn/080818%20-%20Djibouti%20Agreement.pdf (accessed: 07.11.2025)

⁸ Political and Civil Affairs. *UN*. 09.01.2025. <https://unpos.unmissions.org/political-and-civil-affairs-work-unpos> (accessed: 07.11.2025)

⁹ UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/1863. 16.01.2009. *UN*. [https://docs.un.org/ru/S/RES/1863\(2009\)](https://docs.un.org/ru/S/RES/1863(2009)) (accessed: 07.11.2024).

¹⁰ Intergovernmental Organization for Development (IGAD). *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation* 15.06.2009. (In Russ.). https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/afrikanskie-organizacii/1733714/ (accessed: 07.11.2025)

¹¹ UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/1725. 06.12.2006. *UN*. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/588110?ln=en> (accessed: 07.11.2025)

¹² Communique of the 69th Meeting of the Peace and Security Council. 19.01.2007. PSC/PR/Comm(LXIX). *AU*. <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/communiqueeng-69th.pdf> (accessed: 07.11.2025)

2007, the UN Security Council supported the AU's decision and requested to submit "a report to the Security Council within sixty (60) days of the adoption of this resolution with recommendations covering the UN's further engagement in support of peace and security in Somalia, as well as further recommendations on stabilization and reconstruction"¹³.

Thus, we can talk about the UN plan to implement in Somalia a model of consistent deployment of AU and UN forces, giving regional forces a "temporary role" to halt the active conflict stage (as, for example, in the Burundi case¹⁴). The advantages of this model include the operational deployment of peacekeeping forces to stabilize the situation even in conditions when peace agreements have not been reached yet, as well as the possibility of a dialogue between regional peacekeepers and most of the conflicting parties [Khudaykulova 2023: 355].

Following the approval of the mandate of the African Union mission, the UN provided technical and operational guidance in the planning and deployment of the regional peacekeeping force [Shagalov 2011: 212]. However, international experts noted that Somalia lacks the security conditions necessary to deploy a UN peacekeeping operation [Blyth 2019: 3]. The UN's rejection to deploy its peacekeeping operation for security reasons can be seen as an attempt to transfer responsibility for the "coercive peace enforcement" and counter-terrorism operations to a regional actor. At the same time, the UN has assumed obligations to provide logistical support for the activities of African peacekeepers [Shagalov 2011: 12].

The mandate of AMISOM, in addition to maintaining internal security, contained functions of monitoring compliance with human rights and international humanitarian law, conducting investigations and informing the UN Security Council about violations committed against vulnerable groups of the population¹⁵.

In 2020, the UN SC, noting certain positive results of African peacekeepers in countering terrorist groups, proposed to "present options to the Security Council on international support to the whole security environment in Somalia post 2021, including the role of the UN, AU and international partners"¹⁶.

RECONFIGURATION OF THE AU PRESENCE IN SOMALIA

In 2022, the UN SC and the AU PSC supported the reconfiguration of AMISOM into the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS)¹⁷. It is appropriate to assume

¹³ UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/1744. 20.02.2007. *UN*. [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1744%20\(2007\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1744%20(2007)) (accessed: 07.11.2025)

¹⁴ When considering the lessons of UN-AU cooperation, it is possible to highlight the rather successful transformation of the AU Mission in Burundi (AMIB, April 2003 – May 2004) into the UN Operation in Burundi (ONUB, June 2004 – December 2006), authorized by the UN SC Resolution No. 1545 (2004). In this case, the African peacekeepers created a relatively favorable environment for the deployment and conduct of ONUB, which in UN circles is considered as one of the most successful missions of the XXI century [Rubtsova 2016: 49]

¹⁵ Mandate: 2006 – 2007. *AMISOM*. 2022. <https://amisom-au.org/mandate-2006-2007/> (accessed: 07.11.2025)

¹⁶ UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2520. 29.05.2020. *UN*. [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2520\(2020\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2520(2020)) (accessed: 07.11.2025)

¹⁷ See: UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2628. 31.03.2022. *UN*. [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2628\(2022\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2628(2022)) (accessed: 07.11.2025); Communiqué of the 1068th Peace and Security Council meeting. PSC/PR/COMM.1068

that the transformation of AMISOM into ATMIS can be considered as an attempt to move towards a phased handover of security functions to national authorities. However, a critical analysis of AMISOM's results leads to the conclusion that the reconfiguration of the operation was also associated with the need to address a number of operational issues, including the difficulties of managing national contingents and implementing non-military mandate objectives, as well as undermining "internal legitimacy" due to unfounded expectations of the local population [Li 2025: 44].

ATMIS had quite large military and police contingents, and in January 2023, there was an increase in the staff of the mission's civilian component. The new strategic goals of ATMIS determined a few additional operational tasks, such as:

- development of the SSF potential with priority to their staffing and the development of operational skills (of the personnel – *Authors' Note*), provision of operational, material, and technical support (*military component*),

- development of the Somali police capacity to perform core functions throughout the country and assisting in countering violent extremism and social unrest through the development of community-based policing and other crime prevention strategies (*police component*),

- assistance in coordinating stabilization, reconciliation, and state-building activities (*civilian component*).

But even after the deployment of ATMIS, the UN retained its leading role in addressing key issues of political settlement and peacebuilding. Since 2013, the successor to UNPOS, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM)¹⁸, has been operating in Somalia. This mission was authorized to provide the Federal Government of Somalia and African peacekeepers with political recommendations on the revision of the constitutional framework; the reformation of public administration, military, and security sectors; the development of the federal system of Somalia; and the coordination of international donor support¹⁹.

Through UNSOM, the UN moved to provide the AU mission and the local government with strategic-level political and expert advice in order to resolve the internal conflict and build a federal state. Thus, the UN emphasizes the role the regional actor and the responsibility of the national government for the situation in the country [Tishkov 2024: 138].

Additionally, the UN provides logistical support to African peacekeepers through the United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS), which has been operating since 2015. This mission replaced the UN Support Office for the AU Mission in Somalia (UNSOA), established by UN SC Resolution No. 1863 (2009) to provide logistical

(2022). 08.03.2022. *AU Transition Mission in Somali*. <https://atmis-au.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/communique-for-the-1068th-meeting-on-atmis-mandate-8-march-2022.pdf> (accessed: 07.11.2025)

¹⁸ The UNSOM is a special political mission of the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. Its main goal was to help the Somali government achieve peace, stability and reconciliation. It worked closely with the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the African Union Transitional Force in Somalia and supported African partners.

¹⁹ UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2102. 02.05.2013. *UN*. [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2102\(2013\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2102(2013)) (accessed: 07.11.2025)

support for the full deployment of the AU mission and improve its operational efficiency²⁰.

The areas of the UN support to SSF were strictly limited. Funding was provided exclusively through voluntary contributions from Member States to the UNSOS-managed Trust Fund (the SSF Trust Fund). In the process of phasing out ATMIS, UNSOS participated in procedures for the handover of UN-owned Forward Operating Base (FOB)²¹ equipment and infrastructure to the Federal Ministry of Defense of Somalia and facilitated the internal movement of African peacekeepers' troops and equipment.

UNSOS also provides administrative and logistical support to UNSOM, including office and accommodation facilities, food, water, transport, and medical services, as well as financial and personnel support.

Thus, we can talk about the emergence in Somalia of a new approach to interaction along the UN-AU axis, which can be called "partnership deployment," to "combine parallel international, national, and regional operations" [Nikitin 2016:24] to achieve a common goal.

We consider this term more fitting than that of "parallel deployment" proposed by a number of authors [Sherman, Sarfate, Dahir 2021], since in this case, it is the joint work and the UN support for the AU actions that make it possible for the actors of the peacebuilding process to make progress in restoring peace and stability in Somalia. At the same time, the partnership presupposes the existence of specific institutional formats (both at the level of permanent missions and at the level of field missions) and the formalization of relations. The institutionalization became possible due to the signing of the framework document on deepening partnership for peace and security in 2014, as well as mutual agreements at the level of the UN SC and the AU PSC [Zagorsky 2015:73].

According to S.A. Bokeria, the UN and AU structures are becoming increasingly interdependent [Bokeria 2022:193], and this model allows the partners to divide the tasks between themselves, to make use of the strengths, and neutralize the institutional weaknesses of the AU through projected funding and UN advice.

At the same time, it is undoubtedly too early to talk about an equal partnership between the UN and the AU, since the institutional and resource capabilities of these actors differ significantly. But the implementation of this approach allows us to take into account the initiatives of African countries to build new models of regional security, taking into account the specifics of African problems and the resources of African states in accordance with the principles of "African solutions to African problems." The implementation of this principle will ensure "a more nuanced understanding of the complex and shifting relationships between criminal, religious, terrorist and other formal and informal networks" and prevent "developing misguided policies based on a simplistic understanding of these fluid relationships and the reasons for people taking up arms against international interveners." [Karlsrud 2018: 15].

²⁰ UNSOS was established by the UN SC Resolution № 2245 of 09.11.2015. At present, the UNSOS activities are regulated by the UN SC Resolutions № 2628 (2022), № 2670 (2022) and № 2687 (2023).

²¹ Situation in Somalia. Report of the Secretary-General S/2023/758. 13.10.2023. *UN Assistance Mission in Somalia*. <https://unsom.unmissions.org/secretary-generals-reports> (accessed: 08.11.2025)

It can be assumed that the UN will attempt to keep leadership in the political sphere and will increasingly be included in resource support for the regional forces' operations. An illustration of this thesis is the role of the UN in the transition process at the request of the Somali government from ATMIS to a new AU-led mission.

In August 2024, the AU PSC approved a new African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) and submitted to the UN Security Council a general concept of this mission. UN SC Resolution No. 2748 (2024) included the UN in the processes of planning the new mission; identifying mechanisms for its coordination with potential international donors; establishing benchmarks for measuring the progress on the ground; indicating the expected role of international actors in supporting Somalia, including the AU and the UN; and the formation of a comprehensive exit strategy in the future, which will be carried out by the UN in consultation with the AU²².

In December 2024, the UN Security Council, noting that Somalia was “assuming progressively greater responsibility for its national security, including the Somali security forces taking over responsibilities from 7,000 drawn-down ATMIS forces since 2022 and taking over responsibility for over 24 Forward Operating Bases from ATMIS”²³, endorsed the decision of the AU PSC to establish the AUSSOM, which replaced ATMIS on 1 January 2025.

The UN Security Council authorized the AU member states participating in the operation “to take all necessary measures, in full compliance with participating States' obligations under international law <...> and in full respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and unity of Somalia, to:

(a) support the FGS²⁴ to degrade Al-Shabaab²⁵ and affiliates linked to ISIL²⁶/Da'esh, prioritise the protection of civilians in Somalia and provide protection to African Union and United Nations personnel, installations and assets;

(b) support further stabilisation in Somalia and enable state-building priorities, including through capacity building of the Somali security and police forces and the orderly transfer of security responsibilities to Somalia;

and, (c) contribute, in close coordination with humanitarian actors, to the creation of security conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance”²⁷.

EU PARTICIPATION IN THE SOMALI PEACE PROCESS

The African continent, with its population exceeding one and a half billion people and its mineral resources covering almost the entire “Mendeleev's periodic table” of elements, has been long attracting the attention of the European Union (EU), which is trying to establish itself as a global actor. That is why, within the framework of the

²² UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2748. 15.08.2024. *UN Assistance Mission in Somalia*. https://unsos.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/resolution_2748_2024.pdf (accessed 14.12.2025)

²³ UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2767. 27.12.2024. *UN*. [https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2767\(2024\)](https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2767(2024)) (accessed: 07.11.2025)

²⁴ Federal Government of Somalia

²⁵ Somali terrorist group founded in 2004. Banned in Russia.

²⁶ Banned in Russia.

²⁷ Ibid.

Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), the EU conducts field operations to support international efforts to stabilize the situation in the crisis states of Africa, including Somalia.

“Swelling migration flows and the threats of terrorism and violent extremism have sharpened the attention of European policy makers to the potential role of UN peacekeeping operations and regional ad hoc coalitions as potential proxies that can help shore up European security” [Karlsrud 2018: 15].

According to the EU Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa adopted by the European Parliament, the EU declares participation in regional peace processes in five priority areas: the creation of robust and accountable political structures in all countries of the region; assistance to the resolution and prevention of conflicts in cooperation with the states of the region and international organizations, especially the UN and AU; reducing regional security threats, including terrorism, piracy and irregular migration; promoting the economic growth of all countries and people in the region; supporting regional political and economic cooperation while bolstering the role of regional economic communities²⁸.

The mutual interest of the UN and the EU in cooperation in resolving internal conflicts in Africa is understandable. The EU’s institutional capabilities allow it to provide a predictable and stable financial base for regional peacekeeping operations, as well as technologies and qualified military and civilian personnel, which the UN often lacks. Joint work with the UN allows to ensure the political and legal legitimacy of the presence of EU forces and specialists outside traditional area of responsibility (AoR). At the same time, the EU considers the UN as “the centrepiece of a norm-based world order anchored in multilateralism” [Major 2008].

The legal framework for the UN and the EU cooperation in crisis management was founded in September 2003 – June 2007. A mechanism for ongoing consultations in the form of a coordinating committee was formed for joint assessment of cooperation opportunities in planning, personnel training, and information exchange. Since 2013, a high-level political dialogue has been organized along the UN-EU axis, annual meetings of the UN Security Council and the EU Committee on Politics and Security; and regular meetings of the UN Secretary General with the EU High Representative for Security and Defense Policy were held [Zagorsky 2015:73]. The Russian researcher of European security problems D.O. Novikova notes that interaction along the UN-EU axis confirms the degree of development of the EU as “a subject of international security, including in such parameters as coherence, effectiveness and legitimacy of actions” [Novikova 2009: 88].

Considering the role of the EU in new formats of peacekeeping operations involving various institutional actors and international organizations, it should be noted that its participation can help reduce the shortage of financial and organizational resources that significantly limit the activity of African peacekeepers. At the same time, EU financial assistance increases the dependence of AU peacekeeping initiatives on an external donor, which has limited ability to control the efficiency of provided funds spending.

²⁸ Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa, Council Conclusion. *Council of the EU*. 11.11.2011. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-16858-2011-INIT/en/pdf> (accessed: 21.01.2025)

For example, the EU's African Peace Facility (APF)²⁹ has been one of the main sponsors of the AU peacekeeping force in Somalia since its deployment in March 2007. In March 2021, the APF and the Athens Mechanism for support of the EU peacekeeping and training missions in Africa and the Mediterranean region were transformed into the European Peace Facility (EPF). The total budget of the fund for the period 2021–2027 is more than 17 billion Euros³⁰.

The establishment of the European Peace Fund allows the EU to fund sub-regional or EU member state operations in Africa directly. Thus, removing the AU from financial assistance distribution allows the EU to promote its own interests more effectively and use its strategic resources of influence in Africa in possible competition with the United States and China³¹.

At the same time, A.V. Zagorsky correctly notes that expressing “readiness to continue supporting the formation of the Architecture of Peace and Security in Africa, the EU is simultaneously pushing the AU to search for alternative sources of financing and, above all, to increase the participation of African states in financing its peacekeeping activities” to the level of 5-10% of the total costs of a particular operation [Zagorsky 2015:75].

The EU Capacity Building Mission in Somalia (EUCAP Somalia), in collaboration with federal and local governments, works in three directions: strengthening maritime police units in and around the four main Somali ports (Mogadishu, Berbera, Bosaso, and Kismayo); supporting the Somali coast guard and maritime security to develop the ocean economy; supporting, strengthening and reorganizing Somali police forces in coordination with EU-funded activities.

At the same time, a few researchers note that the EU mission in Somalia can be considered as a tool not only to counter pirates, Islamist groups, and illegal armed groups, but also—perhaps, to a greater extent—as a means of limiting unwanted Somali immigration to Europe [Skeppström, Hull Wiklund, Jonsson 2015]. Supporting this point of view, we would like to note that EU measures are mainly aimed at blocking illegal migration routes. They do not provide or create open and safe migration routes for the Somali population as recommended in the Valetta Action Plan. OXFAM analysts note

²⁹ European Peace Facility. *European Commission*. https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/what-we-do/european-peace-facility_en (accessed: 08.12.2025)

³⁰ “In 2007, AMISOM had an authorized strength of 8,000 troops but only some 1,600 Ugandan troops actually deployed. The level of EU financial support to AMISOM at this stage therefore amounted to approximately €700,000 per month. By 2016, AMISOM had over 22,000 personnel and the cost to the EU was about €20 million per month. Most of this financial support was spent on troop allowances, but it was also used for other issues including death and disability compensation for AMISOM peacekeepers killed or wounded in action and indirect support costs such as supporting some AU personnel working on peace support operations in Addis Ababa and AMISOM offices in Nairobi and Mogadishu as well as with training”. See: Williams P.D. Paying for AMISOM: Are Politics and Bureaucracy Undermining the AU's Largest Peace Operation? *International Peace Institute Global Observatory*. 11.01.2017. <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/01/amisom-african-union-peacekeeping-financing/> (accessed: 08.12.2025)

³¹ Fabricius P. EU peace and security funds can now bypass the African Union. *Institute for Security Studies*. 05.02.2021. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/eu-peace-and-security-funds-can-now-bypass-the-african-union> (accessed: 08.10.2025)

that such restraining and restrictive measures can have negative consequences associated with the search and choice of migrants for more life-threatening routes³².

The joint participation of the EU and AU in increasing the capacity of local SSF with the support of the UN may indicate an expanded model of “partnership deployment” of UN peacekeepers with the two most significant regional actors, in which an educational component plays an important role along with financial and logistical support.

The dynamics of the conflict and the high threat of piracy in the coastal waters of Somalia have actualized maritime security activities. Maritime piracy has become a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that poses a serious threat to Somalia's national security and has negative consequences for regional stability and international logistics routes. Among the factors that contributed to the growth of piracy, African researchers highlight geographical features (concentration of ships along a narrow trade route; features of the coastline that provide shelters for pirates), problems of public administration and socio-economic development of the country [Ehiane, Uwizeyimana 2023: 3128].

Given the lack of effectiveness of national security mechanisms, the EU, as an actor external to the UN system, was involved in fulfilling tasks in this area. According to the UN SC Resolution No. 1816 (2008)³³, since September 2008 the European Union has been conducting military coordination activities known as EU Naval Cooperation (EU NAVCO), which was later transformed into EU Naval Force (EU NAVFOR). The EU provides personnel, ships, and technology³⁴ to carry out maritime security tasks in a wide geographical area that includes not only Somalia's coastal territory and its territorial and inland waters but also the southern Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and a large part of the Indian Ocean, including Seychelles, Mauritius, and Comoros.

A special report by the House of Lords noted that EU Operation “Atalanta” contributed to the fight against piracy, in particular in the protection of World Food Program vessels and ships supplying AU peacekeepers, as well as coordination with other maritime forces in the area. But it was noted that solving the problem of piracy is impossible without eliminating the root causes of the conflict in Somalia, building the capacity of national security forces, and providing humanitarian relief³⁵. Eliminating piracy in the region requires addressing a range of challenges, including political instability and lack of good governance, extreme poverty, and lack of equal opportunities for economic growth [Karawita 2019: 23]. Additional efforts should be aimed at

³² Kervyn E., Shilhav R. An emergency for whom? The EU emergency trust fund for Africa – migratory routes and development aid in Africa. *Oxfam International*. 15.11.2017. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/emergency-whom-eu-emergency-trust-fund-africa-migratory-routes-and-development-aid-africa> (accessed: 08.10.2025)

³³ UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/1816. 02.06.2008. *UN*. [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1816\(2008\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1816(2008)) (accessed: 07.11.2025)

³⁴ Naval Force “Atalanta” typically comprises 1-2 Surface Combat Vessels, 1-2 Maritime Patrol Reconnaissance Aircrafts, 1-2 Rotary Wings Aircrafts, 1 Unmanned Aerial System and 1 Autonomous Vessel Protection Detachment. See: European Union Naval Force Somalia. Military Operation Atalanta. *EEAS*. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eu-navfor-somalia/european-union-naval-force-somalia-military-operation-atalanta_und_en (accessed: 08.12.2025)

³⁵ Combating Somali Piracy: the EU’s Naval Operation Atalanta. European Union Committee. *UK Parliament*. 2010. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldselect/ldcom/103/10304.htm> (accessed: 08.12.2025)

synchronizing national legal frameworks with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to create models for effective law enforcement and combating piracy.

Performing specific security tasks in the declared AoR by the EU Naval Forces allows us to talk about a “parallel model” of the deployment of the EU navy with UN and AU operations in Somalia.

CONCLUSION

In the 21st century, international actors attempted to implement an integrated approach to utilize the peacekeeping potential of various actors in the long-standing internal conflict in Somalia resolution. In the face of criticism of the Western liberal-oriented model of internal conflict management, the UN is trying to adapt its practices to difficult conditions in Somalia to preserve and realize the benefits of a global organization, including the universality of mandates and expanded peacekeeping membership, many years of experience in cooperation with various types of missions and operations of other actors. Having suffered at the end of the 20th century failures to conduct its peacekeeping operations UNOSOM-I and UNOSOM-II in Somalia, the UN changed its form of presence in the country to a special field-based political mission.

The activities of global and regional (continental) peacekeeping actors in Somalia took the form of a “partnership deployment”, dividing the ground-based “enforcement” powers of the AU, the EU educational missions, and financial assistance from the UN and international donors under the common political leadership of the UN in the conflict resolution process. The fulfillment by the EU Naval Forces “Atalanta” of specific security tasks in the declared AoR allows us to speak of a “parallel” deployment of the EU navy with the UN and AU operations in Somalia.

In this situation, the UN must continue to adapt to the future changes in Somalia in order to maintain its comparative advantages, allowing it to reduce the political rivalry of various peacekeeping actors and the struggle for their own geopolitical interests of various international organizations, national states, as well as non-state actors. There is a gradual change in the format of UN operations for special political missions. At the same time, more and more emphasis is being placed on the regional organizations and regional economic communities, whose actions reinforce the efforts of the UN.

In cases similar to Somalia, when the military or paramilitary actions against terrorism or violent extremism are considered as a priority for the operations of regional, sub-regional, or coalition forces, the establishment of a peacekeeping mandate by a UN Security Council resolution or a regional security organization is a prerequisite for the legitimacy of the peacekeeping force [Tishkov, Tishkova 2023: 445]. Under these conditions, new formats of interaction may make it possible to neutralize the growing dissatisfaction of African countries with UN peacekeeping approaches, which are largely perceived as a tool influenced by the West [Adu et al. 2023: 419]. Loss of authority and paralysis of UN actions narrows the range of peacekeeping tools [Richmond, Pogodda 2024]. The legitimization of the operations of the African Union by the decision of the UN Security Council makes it possible to solve the problem of adequate and systematic financing of AU missions from the funds of UN peace operations.

At the same time, this mechanism may have a number of unforeseen negative consequences associated with the loss of initiative and independence of the AU as a regional (continental) actor in decision-making when determining the mandate, scale, and timing of the operation, as well as a decrease in the efficiency of the deployment of peacekeeping forces in active phases of conflicts due to the use of UN bureaucratic procedures.

Therefore, in the context of the expansion of the number of actors in peacekeeping, it is advisable for the UN Security Council to introduce a universal system of coordination of efforts within a single operation in order to adapt peacekeeping practices to the conditions of long-term and often fragmented internal conflicts.

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Научная статья

ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЕ ООН И РЕГИОНАЛЬНЫХ АКТОРОВ В СОМАЛИ: В ПОИСКЕ НОВЫХ МОДЕЛЕЙ

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Аннотация. На протяжении последних десятилетий ситуация в сфере безопасности в Сомали вызывает озабоченность мирового сообщества. С 1991 г. Сомали остается практически фрагментированной страной, в которой фактически отсутствует должное государственное управление. Значительная часть национальной территории, за исключением северных районов, подвержена атакам террористических группировок, а военно-клановые организации ведут вооруженное противостояние за обеспечение своего контроля. Дополнительными угрозами в сфере безопасности являются сложившаяся десятилетиями «культура насилия», массовое распространение оружия, приграничные конфликты за территории и доступ к сельскохозяйственным ресурсам. Организация Объединенных Наций, Африканский союз, а также субрегиональные акторы предприняли ряд практических действий для урегулирования внутреннего конфликта и создания национальных институтов, в которых остро нуждался народ Сомали. Совместная работа акторов миротворчества приобрела форму «партнерского развертывания», что позволило комплексно использовать потенциал региональных организаций, разделив наземные «силовые» полномочия миротворцев Африканского союза (АС), образовательные миссии Европейского союза (ЕС) и финансовую помощь ООН и международных доноров, при сохранении за ООН общего политического лидерства в процессе урегулирования конфликта. Совместное участие миротворческих сил АС и ЕС в решении задач по повышению потенциала местных сил безопасности при поддержке ООН может говорить о расширенной модели «партнерского развертывания» миротворцев ООН с двумя наиболее весомыми региональными акторами. В условиях расширения количества акторов миротворчества представляется целесообразным ввести универсальную систему координации усилий в рамках одной операции, чтобы адаптировать миротворческие практики к условиям современных внутренних конфликтов.

Ключевые слова: ООН, АС, ЕС, миротворчество, партнерское развертывание, параллельные операции

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Конфликт интересов: авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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PENAL POLICY AND JUSTICE IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES: HISTORY AND MODERNITY

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Abstract. This article examines the social and political history of African prisons and the evolution of penal policy in African countries from the pre-colonial era (the slave trade of the 15th and 16th centuries) to the present. It analyzes the historical impact of colonization on the justice system and contemporary criminal investigation practices. Emphasis is placed on the traditional form of prison, which generally follows the principles of customary law but is limited to the civil and commercial spheres. Prison is viewed not only as a legal institution but also as an instrument of power, reflecting socioeconomic relations within the state, as well as the colonial and neocolonial legacy. The influence of Western development institutions on criminal and penal policy is demonstrated. Particular attention is paid to the interference of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the justice systems of African states. In practice, the punitive model used by the ICC against African leaders has proven ineffective in resolving many problems, primarily related to political conflicts. The deterioration of relations between the African Union (AU) and the ICC accelerated the process of establishing an African Criminal Court with the goal of gaining autonomy and primacy over justice processes in Africa. The study shows that penal policies in African countries have been associated with the punishment and isolation of both criminal and political opponents, including through international jurisdiction. This, of course, represents a certain limitation of state sovereignty. It is no coincidence that for many states on the continent, the struggle for genuine sovereignty, including in the area of jurisdiction, is becoming a priority.

Keywords: Africa, justice, prison, penal policy, International Criminal Court, Malabo Protocol, African Criminal Court

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INTRODUCTION

Prison is a fundamental element of the penal system throughout the world, one of the mechanisms of state domination. When studying the history of prisons in Africa, some researchers adopt a “diffusionist” perspective on the global development of

imprisonment. They posit that it is a Western “invention” that originated in Europe and the United States before spreading worldwide, including to Africa. This group of scholars [Bernault 1999; Deyon 1975; Rothman 1971] argues that imprisonment in Africa emerged alongside its colonization.

In Angola, for example, it is believed that the isolation in prisons first emerged in the late 15th century, alongside the establishment of Portuguese colonies. This typically affected Portuguese who were exiled, as well as black slaves who were held in custody. Initially, prisoners were housed in military fortresses. Later, “civilian” prisons began to emerge in cities, usually on the premises of a municipal palace or inside warehouses, where both white and black prisoners were held together [Bernault 1999: 84].

During the colonial era, prisons were modeled on prisoner-of-war camps and were purely repressive institutions that served the racial regime [Zinoman 2001: 16].

Another group of scholars who have studied the history of prisons in Africa find it problematic to view prisons as a Western “invention,” since much of this history remains unknown, especially in pre-colonial societies [Claustre 2007; Deslaurier 2019; Gibson 2011; Lusset 2017; Muchnik 2019].

JUSTICE IN AFRICA IN THE PRE-COLONIAL ERA

To gain a more complete understanding of the modern prison, it is important to explore the non-European roots of imprisonment in Africa, particularly its role in the penal or military practices of pre-colonial and colonial societies.

According to ancient chronicles and travelers’ accounts, empires and kingdoms in sub-Saharan Africa are known to have used separate rooms, as well as special pits or cages, to isolate political rivals. This practice was characteristic of many African societies with centralized power. In Ethiopia, for example, from the late 13th to the late 18th century, special prisons were created to imprison the sons, brothers, or nephews of emperors, thus preventing attempts to overthrow them and ensuring dynastic stability. The most famous of these, Geshen and Wani, were located on the tops of inaccessible mountains. Prisoners could spend their entire lives there, except when called to the throne. The same occurred in the kingdoms of Buganda and Dahomey [Deslaurier 2019]. This practice of exiling and imprisoning recalcitrant rulers continued during the colonial conquests at the turn of the 20th century.

As colonial empires expanded, the locations of imprisonment of potential claimants to the throne became increasingly remote. For example, Samori Touré, the founder of the Wassoulou Empire, ended his life on the island of N’Djole (Gabon) after being captured by the French army in 1898. Benhazine, the King of Dahomey, was initially exiled to Martinique in 1894 and then transported to Algeria, where he died. Several rebellious kings and sultans, along with their entourages, were deported by the British to the Seychelles. In Congo, a decree of “expulsion” was issued in 1889, authorizing the Belgian authorities to expel several leaders from their region, including the King of Rwanda in 1933 [Deslaurier 2019: 41].

It is worth noting that pre-colonial Africa had its own justice mechanisms for the rest of society, which varied significantly from those that existed in Europe. It is evident from research in the field of legal anthropology that, when resolving conflict, traditional African civilizations demonstrated a preference for restorative justice, based on compensation rather than retribution. Pretrial detention ended with the reconciliation of the parties rather than the punishment of the perpetrator, as local justice systems focused

primarily on the victim, not the perpetrator. This approach can be explained by animistic sanctity and the need of restoring harmony within the community [John-Nambo 2002: 327].

Punishment was imposed on the offender's tribe, except in cases where their kin had distanced themselves from them and expelled them from their clan. Corporal punishments that did not involve imprisonment included the amputation of a hand or what was termed the poison ordeal. Capital punishment was regarded as an extreme measure and reserved for criminals who posed a threat to the local communities, primarily repeat offenders and witches [Martineau 2016].

Despite the absence of "written law" in the pre-colonial period, when all knowledge was passed down orally from generation to generation, one cannot help but note the existence of oral codes such as the Manden Charter. It was a set of norms created in the Mali Empire and adopted in 1236 in Kurukan Fuga (Mali) [Zavyalova 2022]. The Charter is a reconstruction from epic sources, to which several Griots¹ from Guinea and Senegal contributed [Tatarovskaya 2024: 145]. It includes not only the rights of men and women but also those of animals and nature, thereby expanding the scope of law.

Over a long period of time, these oral codes were influenced by legal norms from other regions. This was primarily due to the influence of Islamic law, which had been spreading in North and West Africa since the 7th century. Many of its norms, as interpreted by the Maliki madhhab², coincided with the principles of customary law. However, the most significant influence on African justice came from the law of European states, which was introduced in the colonies beginning from the 19th century. Nevertheless, it did not entirely replace the traditional law that had been in force previously. As a result, a "dual legal system" emerged, which over time transformed into an even more complex 'hybrid system,' in which traditional legal norms remained (with very limited impact on the regulation of social relations) [Mupendana, Sapogov 2022, Entin 1966].

CUSTODY AND PUNISHMENT IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

During the colonial period in Africa, local institutions associated with the legal order remained partially intact³. These institutions functioned provided that they did not conflict with the principles of justice of the metropolis, which introduced its own penal regulations in the colonies. For example, the decree of November 10, 1903, issued by the French Minister of Colonies, on the reorganization of the judicial service in the colonies

¹ A Griot is a professional keeper of historical knowledge and cultural traditions within the social caste system of West African countries [Tatarovskaya 2024].

² The Maliki school of thought is one of the four canonical schools of thought in Sunni Islam. It was founded by Imam Malik ibn Anas (717–801).

³ In Rwanda, for example, the traditional *Gacaca* courts, which derive their name from the Swahili word for "on the grass" in Swahili due to the fact that trials were held outdoors rather than indoors, have been preserved for centuries. In 2001, the Rwandan government proposed transferring cases involving accusations of murder, rape, and robbery during the Tutsi genocide (April–July 1994) to these traditional courts. This was due to the overburdened capacity of both the International Criminal Court for Rwanda and the Rwandan Criminal Court. From 2005 to 2012, a total of 12,103 traditional courts tried approximately two million people, one million of whom were found guilty. In 2012, the *Gacaca* courts ceased to exist due to serious criticism of judicial incompetence, a lack of impartiality in hearings, and corruption. For more information, see: Kuhn S. Justice à l'échelle locale: les tribunaux gacaca face au génocide des Tutsi rwandais (La). *EHNE*. 2022. <https://francegenocidetutsi.org/JusticeEchelleLocaleGacacaEhne2022.pdf> (accessed: 27.10.2025)

under the Governor-General of French West Africa (FWA), replaced corporal punishment with imprisonment and limited the jurisdictional powers of local chiefs by appointing their own administrators at the head of “native” courts⁴.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, African prisons were not just places for the victims of colonial rule but also symbols of racial inequality. European settlers and conquerors regarded Africans as subhuman beings, as savages, who were incapable of being “civilized.” This attitude was manifest in prisons as well, where white prisoners received better clothing, food, accommodation, and vocational training than black prisoners. Unlike European prisons, which gradually abandoned torture in the late 19th century, colonial prisons increasingly adopted this practice, using it as a means of suppressing the will of African peoples and enforcing racist dogmas [Sarkin 2008: 25].

This was made possible by the adoption by the French government in 1881 in Algeria of the Code of Indigenous Peoples (*Code de l'indigénat*). By 1887, its jurisdiction had already been extended to cover the entire French West Africa⁵. The document provided for a special administrative and criminal regime for the indigenous peoples living in this territory. It contained a list of 27 offenses by natives, punishable by various penalties, including fines, forced labor, requisition of property, and imprisonment. Furthermore, the governor had the right to intern any person suspected of threatening the security of the colonial state for a period of 10 years.

The Code of Indigenous Peoples, which remained in force until 1946, was an important legal instrument of colonial rule, symbolizing the differences between the indigenous population and the French colonizers.

As the colonial system consolidated, penalties for all forms of “native” resistance (political, fiscal, religious, ideological) became increasingly stringent, while the category of individuals subject to political imprisonment expanded. During the struggle for independence, when Africans challenged the colonial system, the colonial administration imposed even greater restrictions on their political activity.

A significant number of political leaders and trade unionists, such as Habib Bourguiba in Tunisia, Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya, Patrice Lumumba in the Belgian Congo, Robert Mugabe in Southern Rhodesia, Nelson Mandela in South Africa, and others, were imprisoned.

These targeted detentions were accompanied by mass arrests, particularly when the liberation struggle took on armed forms. In Algeria, Cameroon, Southern Rhodesia, and Kenya, thousands of combatants were detained and held in special camps established under emergency legislation [Deslaurier 2019].

THE POLICY OF CRIMINAL OPPRESSIVENESS IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICA

Colonial pressure on the opposition through penal coercion, combined with pre-colonial practices of social and physical extermination of competitors, persisted into the post-colonial period [Abramova 2023]. In the 1960s and 1970s, with the establishment of single-party regimes and the personalization of power in several African countries, political opponents were brutally persecuted. Accusations relating to alleged coup

⁴ Décret du 10 novembre 1903 portant réorganisation du service de la justice dans les colonies relevant du Gouvernement général de l'Afrique Occidentale, Po III 8° 997, 1903. *Légifrance*. <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000000299774> (accessed: 26.10.2025)

⁵ Code de l'indigénat. *Université Laval Québec*. https://www.axl.cefano.ulaval.ca/afrique/indigenat_code.htm (accessed: 26.10.2025)

attempts, undermining the internal or external state security, colluding with foreign powers, participating in armed groups, inciting rebellion or disrespecting the head of state were widely used.

Such prisoners were often tortured and executed in prison. During the reign of Malian President Moussa Traoré (1968–1991), who came to power after a military coup in November 1968, political prisoners were exiled to Taoudeni, a village located in one of the most inhospitable places in the Sahara Desert, 750 km north of the city of Timbuktu. Salt has long been mined there. Accused of plotting against the Traoré regime, prisoners there died from the unbearable conditions while working in the salt mines.

Among the prisoners buried there was Yoro Diakité (1932–1973), a Malian statesman and military leader (1968–1971), who was one of the main leaders of the 1968 coup that overthrew President Modiba Keita (1960–1968) [Vitukhina, Onuchko 2005: 74]. When M. Traoré came to power, Yoro Diakité became prime minister (1968–1969). After two years in this post, he was demoted on charges of conspiracy and sent to hard labor in Taoudeni. The death of Y. Diakité, who was subjected to brutal torture and abuse there for two years until his death in 1973, was described in the memoirs of the Malian writer Samba Gainé Sandara, “Ten Years in the Deadly Penal Servitude of Taoudeni” [Sangaré 2001].

It is also worth mentioning the Camp Boiro under Sékou Touré (1958–1984) in Guinea [Paravy 2008], the underground cells (“Swimming Pools”) under Hissène Habré (1982–1990) in Chad, the Moroccan penal colony of Tazmamart under Hassan II (1961–1999), or the “special” camp of Ruhengeri in Rwanda under J. Habyarimana (1973–1994). Many prominent individuals who criticized the dictatorial regimes of their countries were imprisoned in these places. In Guinea, for example, people were punished for “insulting the revolution,” while in Cameroon, endless administrative arrests were used to punish “subversive” actions. In 2019, Maurice Kamto, who had been Paul Biya’s opponent in the 2018 presidential elections, was arrested on these charges, as well as more than a hundred of his relatives.

It should be emphasized that the social and physical elimination of political opponents through imprisonment most often occurs during periods of institutional or electoral crises, civil wars, counterinsurgency, or terrorism [Le Marcis, Morelle 2022]. In such circumstances, prisoners are considered “political” because the reasons for their arrest—and their release—are politically motivated. Therefore, it is not surprising that the opposition typically demands the release of such individuals immediately after a regime change or electoral victory. This is implemented in the form of a pardon or amnesty.

Under Macky Sall, more than a thousand prisoners in Senegal were held in extremely harsh conditions. They were the victims of a series of arrests that began in 2021, following the detention of the main opposition leader, Ousmane Sonko⁶. Some of them spent more than two years in prison for criticizing Sall’s regime on social media, for participating in demonstrations against the government, and for membership in the main opposition party, the African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics, and Fraternity (*Patriotes africains du Sénégal pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité*, PASTEF, the ruling party since 2024). Those arrested were all charged with disturbing public order,

⁶ Ousmane Sonko, the current Prime Minister of Senegal and the key figure in the two-year standoff with the government of M. Sall and the justice system, was imprisoned from July 2023 to March 2024. Having been declared a candidate for the 2024 presidential elections, he was disqualified by the Constitutional Council due to his criminal record. His supporters called on Senegalese to vote for his ally, Diomaye Faye, who, like Ousmane Sonko, was granted amnesty by M. Sall several days before the elections, before his sentencing.

actions threatening state security, and participating in unauthorized activities aimed at opposing M. Sall's re-election to a third term.

Following a wave of releases in the wake of the victory of opposition candidate Diomaye Bassirou Faye in the presidential elections of May 24, 2024, the state began paying financial assistance of €760 per person to former prisoners, many of whom were injured in clashes with police, beginning in January 2025. The families of each deceased person (of whom there were several dozen) were to receive €15,000. The total payment is expected to amount to €7.6 million⁷. The new government believes that former political prisoners and PASTEF supporters who have risen to its defense should receive the necessary financial support for their reintegration into normal life.

The new president of Senegal is leading the country's judicial reforms. The drafting of legislation on the Constitutional Court and constitutional revision is nearing completion. Key reforms include establishing an office of a "judge for liberties and detention" (juge des libertés et de la détention)⁸, and amending the criminal and criminal procedure codes, including those affecting criminal prosecution procedures. According to the head of state, these reforms will improve transparency and the effectiveness of the judiciary⁹.

TOWARDS A GLOBAL HISTORY OF IMPRISONMENT

Some legal scholars and historians argue that modern criminal justice systems are based on those of the colonial era [Mègret 2014, Martineau 2016]. In this regard, it is worth noting the activities of such an organization as the International Criminal Court (ICC), which officially began its work on July 1, 2002¹⁰, and until recently, dealt with crimes committed primarily in African countries. Because of its obvious focus on Africa, critics of the ICC accuse it of having a neocolonial agenda under the guise of combating impunity and protecting human rights¹¹. Some even call it a "globalist institution."¹² As of April 2024, of the 54 individuals indicted by the Court, 47 were citizens of African states¹³.

⁷ Cluzel C. Au Sénégal, les victimes de la repression sous Macky Sall en quête de justice et de vérité. *Le Point*. 20.03.2025. https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/au-senegal-les-victimes-de-la-repression-sous-macky-sall-en-quete-de-justice-et-de-la-verite-20-03-2025-2585242_3826.php (accessed: 24.10.2025)

⁸ Judges for liberties and detention (juges des libertés et de la détention, JLD) are responsible for overseeing the restrictions over individuals' freedoms under the French penal procedure. The office was first created in France in 2000.

⁹ Gucye M. Sénégal : Bassirou Diomaye Faye promet une réforme de la justice. *LEBRIEF.MA/Afrique*. 17.01.2025. <https://www.lebrief.ma/afrique/senegal-bassirou-diomaye-faye-promet-une-reforme-de-la-justice-100053574> (accessed: 24.10.2025)

¹⁰ The International Criminal Court was established by the Rome Statute in 1998. As of 2024, 137 states had signed the treaty, but only 124 had ratified it. It entered into force on July 1, 2002. Although Russia and the United States signed the ICC Statute, they have not ratified it. In 2002, the United States, and in 2016, Russia withdrew their signatures from the treaty. Of the 33 African countries that have signed and ratified the ICC Statute, not all did so voluntarily. Some were pressured into signing in order to preserve loans from the IMF and other donors, such as the Soros Foundation [Mezyaev 2018: 23].

¹¹ Forson V. Cour pénale internationale: l'hémorragie africaine continue. *Le Point*. 26.10.2016. https://lepoint.fr/afrique-cour-penale-internationale-l-hemorragie-africaine-continue-26-10-2016-2078766_3826.php (accessed: 29.03.2025)

¹² Djerrad A. La Cour pénale internationale "est conçue pour l'Afrique et non pour l'Occident". *International Reporters*. 27.05.2024. <https://www.ir-press.ru/fr/2024/05/27/la-cour-penale-internationale-est-concue-pour-lafrique-et-non-pour-loccident> (accessed: 23.10.2025)

¹³ ICC: When and why was the International Criminal Court established? *RBC Radio*. 24.12.2024. (In Russ.). <https://www.rbc.ru/base/20/12/2024/676502209a79479214d0e00d> (accessed: 31.10.2025)

The first person to be prosecuted by the ICC prosecutor was Thomas Lubanga, a Congolese warlord who led the Union of Congolese Patriots, an ethnic *Hema* militia that actively participated in the war in the Ituri region of north-eastern DRC. The trial began in January 2009 and lasted until 2012¹⁴. The former warlord was sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment for recruiting children under the age of 15 and using them in combat¹⁵.

The ICC's March 2009 arrest warrant for the former President of Sudan (1993–2019), on charges of crimes against humanity, caused a major stir among African leaders. However, the Sudanese leader rejected the Court's decision, stating that it was "not even worth the ink it was written in."¹⁶ Many African states have expressed strong disapproval of the ICC's actions against Omar al-Bashir and have voiced their disagreement with its decision. Moreover, after the arrest warrant was issued, these states hosted the Sudanese president during his travels across the continent and even outside of the continent, including to Russia, Jordan and China¹⁷.

In an interview with the Sudan Tribune, the Rwandan President Paul Kagame stated that Africans would not comply with the ICC's recommendations to arrest Omar al-Bashir and transfer him to The Hague¹⁸. He accused the organization of "Afrocentrism."¹⁹ In 2013, Rwanda, along with Kenya and Uganda, organized protests against the ICC's prosecution of Kenyan politician and statesman Uhuru Kenyatta (2013–2022), who won the Kenyan presidential election after being indicted by the court.

That same year, the African Union (AU) made an appeal to the UN Security Council, urging the ICC to postpone cases against current African leaders and, most importantly, against U. Kenyatta, whom the Court had accused of crimes against humanity during the 2007–2008 political crisis. In December 2014, the charges against him were dropped due to a lack of evidence [Sadovskaya 2016: 21].

According to Guy Rossatanga-Rignault, a professor of public law in Libreville, Gabon, "these cases demonstrate the ease with which Western powers interfere in the justice system, calling into question the capacity of African states to determine themselves and decide their own destiny in the post-colonial era" [Rossatanga-Rignault 2013: 184].

One example is France's intervention in Côte d'Ivoire during the 2010–2011 electoral crisis. It culminated in the arrest of former President Laurent Gbagbo (2000–2011) by French special forces following his refusal to recognize the election results. On November 30, 2011, he was secretly transferred from an Ivorian prison in the north of the country to The Hague and handed over to the ICC. In 2013, his close associate, Charles Blé Goudé, who had previously headed the Young Patriots organization in Côte d'Ivoire, was detained in Ghana and handed over to the Ivorian authorities. In 2014, he was sent to

¹⁴ Lubanga was arrested in Kinshasa in March 2005 and transferred to the ICC in March 2006. He was then taken to The Hague, where he remained in pre-trial detention pending the Court's final decision. For more information, see: Background. International Justice Monitor. Thomas Lubango Dyilo. *International Justice Monitor*. <https://ijmonitor.org/thomas-lubanga-background/> (accessed: 25.10.2025)

¹⁵ Forson V. Cour pénale internationale: l'hémorragie africaine continue. *Le Point*. 26.10.2016. https://lepoint.fr/afrique-cour-penale-internationale-l-hemorragie-africaine-continue-26-10-2016-2078766_3826.php (accessed: 29.03.2025)

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Faivre A. La réconciliation est-elle possible entre l'Afrique et la Cour pénale internationale? *Le Point*. 21.01.2019. https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/la-reconciliation-est-elle-possible-entre-l-afrique-et-la-cour-penale-internationale-21-01-2019-2287553_3826_php (accessed: 04.03.2025)

The Hague to undergo judicial proceedings. His deportation process resembled a colonial operation. In 2019, the ICC issued a decision to pardon Gbagbo and Blé Goudé due to a lack of sufficient evidence of their guilt in crimes against humanity, but they were not granted amnesty by President A. Ouattara²⁰.

Other African leaders indicted by the ICC include Muammar Gaddafi, the former leader of the People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (1969–2011), his son, Saif al-Islam, Abdullah al-Senussi, the former head of Libya's intelligence service, and Jean-Pierre Bemba, the former Vice President of the DRC (2003–2006).

The ICC's actions against African presidents, former presidents, and other high-ranking officials have caused most African leaders to lose faith in this international organization, viewing it as a political instrument of Western domination [Gbadi, Akafomo 2018]. It is worth noting that the ICC is conceptually built exclusively on the Western model of repressive (punitive) justice, while the traditional African court is guided by the principles of restorative (reconciliatory) justice.

Beginning in 2013, the African Union began to issue resolutions calling on states on the continent not to cooperate with the ICC and ultimately to withdraw collectively from the 1998 Rome Statute of the ICC, citing the court's selective prosecution of Africans [Vilmer 2014:7]. According to a prominent Russian scholar in African Studies, A.B. Mezyaev, "For twenty years, the entire activity of the International Criminal Court has been focused exclusively on Africa: it is here that the global elite is developing a new global law <...> The International Criminal Court has become the first major institution of a new global project—global law. The goal of this project is to eliminate international law created by states and replace it with judicial decisions."²¹

In December 2017, the Republic of Burundi became the first African country to pass a law to withdraw from the Rome Statute of the ICC. However, not all states supported the idea. States such as Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Malawi, Senegal, Zambia, and Sierra Leone stated that they would not withdraw [Mezyaev 2018: 25]. At the AU summit in January 2017, Liberia, Tunisia, and Tanzania expressed concerns about leaving the ICC, while West African countries generally formed a bloc of states supporting the organization, unwilling to lose loans from the IMF or other donors.

Therefore, at this stage, the efforts of individual countries (South Africa, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and several others) to withdraw from the ICC have proven unsuccessful. While the AU has decided not to cooperate with the ICC, African states continue to refer cases to The Hague²², as noted by Drissa Traoré, Vice President of the International Federation for Human Rights. This has happened after elections in Mali in 2012, the Central African Republic in 2014, and Gabon in 2016. This has enabled the ICC to initiate legal proceedings against individuals transferred to it by these states.

Nevertheless, there has long been a latent political confrontation over criminal jurisdiction between African countries and the International Criminal Court. The ICC's relationship with African countries underscores the legitimacy crisis of Western-centric

²⁰ For this reason, two months before the presidential elections in October 2025, the Constitutional Court of Côte d'Ivoire rejected L. Gbagbo's candidacy.

²¹ Mezyaev A. The International Criminal Court Twenty Years Later. *Strategic Culture Foundation*. 16.07.2018. (In Russ.). <https://www.fondsk.ru/news/2018/07/16/mezhdunarodnyj-ugolovnyj-sud-dvadcat-let-spustja.html> (accessed: 22.10.2025)

²² Faivre A. La réconciliation est-elle possible entre l'Afrique et la Cour pénale internationale? *Le Point*. 21.01.2019. https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/la-reconciliation-est-elle-possible-entre-l-afrique-et-la-cour-penale-internationale-21-01-2019-2287553_3826_php (accessed: 04.03.2025)

institutions, which are increasingly finding it difficult to claim global status [Degterev 2024: 42].

It is evident that this organization is financially dependent on the West. Its budget, which exceeds \$150 million annually, is constantly supported by sponsors such as the Soros Foundation. Therefore, it is evident that the ICC is obligated to justify its work and prove its loyalty to the West by declining to initiate legal proceedings against individuals from NATO member states²³.

TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN AFRICAN CRIMINAL COURT

Since 2013, the preconditions for establishing a future African Court on Human Rights with criminal jurisdiction have emerged. This was entirely justified, as crimes against procedural and substantive criminal law are already being extensively dealt with by the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the principal judicial body of the African Union²⁴. It is evident that this constitutes a compelling argument in favor of establishing an African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, whose jurisdiction would also extend to international crimes falling under international criminal law [Frédéric, Dzessa 2022].

The deterioration of relations between the AU and the ICC accelerated the process of establishing an African Criminal Court. On July 27, 2014, at the AU Heads of State Summit held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, a document amending the Protocol on the Statute of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (AfCHPR), commonly known as the Malabo Protocol²⁵, was adopted. This decision was precipitated by the necessity to expand the ACHR's jurisdiction to include the Criminal Chamber for International Crimes.

In addition to the four core crimes (genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and aggression) set out in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the Protocol includes 10 additional crimes (Article 28A), including unconstitutional change of power, piracy, terrorism, and corruption. The Protocol also introduces corporate criminal liability (Article 46C), alongside the individual criminal responsibility (Article 46B) in international criminal law²⁶. However, it also includes a provision that no charges shall be commenced or continued before the Court against any serving AU Head of State or Government, or anybody acting or entitled to act in such capacity, or other senior state officials based on their functions, during their tenure of office (Article 46A bis²⁷).

The Malabo Protocol is ambitious, largely due to the support of the Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU), which unites national bar associations and individual lawyers

²³ Djerrad A. La Cour pénale internationale "est conçue pour l'Afrique et non pour l'Occident". *International Reporters*. 27.05.2024. <https://www.ir-press.ru/fr/2024/05/27/la-cour-penale-internationale-est-concue-pour-lafrique-et-non-pour-loccident/> (accessed: 23.10.2025)

²⁴ The African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights is a continental jurisdiction established by African states to ensure the protection of human and peoples' rights in Africa. It began operating in Addis Ababa in November 2006 before moving to Arusha, Tanzania, in 2007. The Court's jurisdiction extends to violations of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, adopted in Addis Ababa in 1990, and the Protocol on the Rights of Women, signed in Maputo in 2003.

²⁵ Seeking Justice or Shielding Suspects? An analysis of the Protocol on the African Court. *KPTJ*. 2016. <https://kptj.africog.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Malabo-Report.pdf> (accessed: 10.11.2025)

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

from over 50 African countries²⁸. Its adoption signaled Africa's commitment to autonomy and sovereignty in justice-related matters. However, it is important to note that despite its adoption over a decade ago, the Protocol has yet to enter into force [Barigayomwe, Prevost 2022]. This is due to the stipulations outlined in Article 11, which state that the agreement enters into force 30 days after the deposit of instruments of ratification by 15 AfCHPR member states²⁹. According to the latest available data, 15 states (Angola, Benin, Chad, Comoros, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Kenya, Mozambique, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, São Tomé and Príncipe, Togo, and Uganda) have already signed the Protocol, and Angola has ratified it.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZED PUNITIVE PROCESSES

One example of colonial criminal justice in Africa is the secret prison established by France in Gao, Mali, known as “Château.” The Gao camp, the main French military base in Mali, was formally under the joint control of French forces implementing Operation Barkhane, the UN peacekeeping force (MINUSMA), and the Malian armed forces (FAMA)³⁰.

In February 2021, Pierre Alonso, a French journalist, was the first to publicize the existence of a secret prison and the details of the Malian jihadist suspects held there³¹. Another French journalist, Rémi Carayol, conducted a more detailed investigation into the Gao prison and published the book “*Le mirage sahélien - La France en guerre en Afrique. Serval, Barkhane et après?*” in 2023. One chapter of the book is dedicated to this prison, which held an unknown number of jihadist suspects.

This secret detention facility was located within the grounds of the airport in Gao, one of the major cities in northern Mali. The French army was based in the eastern part, while Malian troops occupied the western half. The prison itself was located in the center of a labyrinth of tents and prefabricated buildings. The French had transformed the airport into an impenetrable fortress. It is noteworthy that this facility was not officially listed in any directory or publication. According to the French journalist Mickaël Pauron, author of the book “*Les ambassades de la Françafrique: L'héritage colonial de la diplomatie française*” [Pauron 2022], this secrecy can be explained by the fact that not only the French military contingent participating in Operation Barkhane but also radical Islamist groups and even Tuareg tribes (through whom the French military identified jihadists during interrogations) were all involved in the illegal uranium business in Mali [Ouffene, Biard 2025]. It was the French military bases in Africa that served as the strongholds of this illegal network.

Those arrested by the French soldiers were held in harsh conditions for days or even weeks. French intelligence officers interrogated them day and night. The prisoners were

²⁸ Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU). *Expert dictionary*. (In Russ.). <https://sl.ceur.ru/dictionary/pan-african-lawyers-union-palu-pan-afrikanskij-soyuz-yuristov/> (accessed: 22.10.2025)

²⁹ Seeking Justice or Shielding Suspects? An analysis of the Protocol on the African Court. *KPTJ*. 2016. <https://kptj.africog.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Malabo-Report.pdf> (accessed: 10.11.2025)

³⁰ On January 11, 2013, French forces intervened militarily in Mali under the pretext of halting the advance of Islamic terrorist groups into the center of the country. In August 2014, Operation Serval was renamed Operation Barkhane and expanded to four other Sahel countries—Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad—an area of particular interest to France.

³¹ Pauron M. La prison secrète du Barkhane. *Afrique XXI. Libération*. 21.02.2021. <https://afriquexxi.info/La-prison-secrete-de-Barkhane> (accessed: 22.10.2025)

kept in complete isolation, in cells with no windows, light, table, chair, shower, or toilet. There was only a mattress on the floor. Access to the prisoners was restricted to a select few soldiers; telephone communications were systematically jammed. After interrogation, the prisoners could be handed over to Malian security forces or simply released without any notice.

According to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), France has committed to ensuring the safety and security of prisoners at the secret prison, in line with international humanitarian law. In turn, the Malian government has also assumed responsibility for the safety and security of individuals transferred to it by France³².

Although this agreement obligated France to continue monitoring the fate of prisoners handed over to the Malians, this condition was not observed, and prisoners often simply disappeared. Civil activists referred to this as a “black hole.” They raised questions about the use of torture in this center, which was outside Malian control. As for the French military command of Operation Barkhane, it did not respond to their inquiries.

Following the deterioration of relations between Mali and France in 2021 and, in particular, Paris’s harsh criticism of the Malian authorities for refusing to hold presidential elections in 2022, Mali terminated its defense agreement with France. In turn, Mali’s transitional government accused France of supporting terrorists. The command of the Gao operational platform has now been transferred to the Malian armed forces, currently operating jointly with Russian security forces.

Following the departure of the French military from Mali, horrific crimes committed against the local population gradually came to light. Gao prison embodied the former colonial power’s new methods of control and punishment, as well as its desire to maintain neocolonial policies by inciting conflict and transferring power to leaders under its control.

CONCLUSION

As with other parts of the colonized world, Africa long served as a laboratory for European prison technologies, where colonial administrators experimented with new forms of social and physical control and punishment, free from the ethical and legal constraints that might have been encountered in Europe. The European legal system categorized Africans not as subjects or citizens but as something less significant than humans.

The colonial and neocolonial legacy inevitably leaves its mark on African prisons, which, as elsewhere in the world, reflect the country’s internal socioeconomic relations and political climate. It is worth noting that there have been recent shifts in the African prison policy. These shifts are primarily aimed at implementing international standards in the penitentiary sphere, such as improving conditions, reducing the prison population, and using alternative forms of punishment, both custodial and non-custodial (house arrest, bail, suspended sentences or postponement of execution of punishment, community service, etc.).

It’s worth noting that global geopolitical transformation has inevitably impacted the penitentiary policies of African states, which continue to struggle for genuine sovereignty in criminal jurisdiction. This involves expanding the authority of the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights to cover international crimes committed on the African

³² Ibid.

continent. Unfortunately, the absence of consensus among African countries on this issue has impeded the establishment of an African Criminal Court. This requires willpower, mental decolonization, and time.

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Научная статья

ПЕНИТЕНЦИАРНАЯ ПОЛИТИКА И ПРАВОСУДИЕ В СТРАНАХ АФРИКИ: ИСТОРИЯ И СОВРЕМЕННОСТЬ

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Аннотация. В данной статье исследуется социальная и политическая история африканских тюрем, эволюция пенитенциарной политики африканских стран, начиная с доколониальной эпохи (захвата рабов в XV–XVI вв.) до настоящего времени. Анализируется историческое влияние колонизации на систему правосудия и современную практику уголовного расследования. Делается акцент на ее традиционной форме, которая в целом следует принципам обычного права, но ограничивается гражданской и коммерческой сферами. Тюрьма рассматривается не только как юридический институт, но и как инструмент власти, являющийся отражением социально-экономических отношений внутри государства, а также колониального и неоколониального наследия. Показано влияние западных институтов развития на уголовную и пенитенциарную политику. Особое внимание уделяется вмешательству Международного уголовного суда (МУС) в систему правосудия африканских государств. На практике карательная модель, используемая МУС в отношении африканских лидеров, оказалась несостоятельной для урегулирования многих проблем, связанных с политическими конфликтами. Ухудшение отношений между Африканским союзом (АС) и МУС ускорило процесс создания Африканского уголовного суда с целью получения автономии и главенства над процессами правосудия в Африке. Проведенное исследование показывает, что пенитенциарная политика в странах Африки была сопряжена с наказанием и изоляцией как уголовных, так и политических оппонентов, в том числе и с помощью международной юрисдикции. А это, безусловно, является ограничением государственного суверенитета. Неслучайно для многих государств

континента борьба за подлинный суверенитет, в том числе и в области права, выходит на передний план.

Ключевые слова: Африка, правосудие, тюрьма, пенитенциарная политика, Международный уголовный суд, Протокол Малабо, Африканский уголовный суд

Конфликт интересов: автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Interview

AFRICAN STUDIES AND ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE 1960S–1990s: A CHANGE OF MILESTONES

Interview with R.N. Ismagilova, Institute for African Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences



Social anthropologist, D.Sc. (History), Professor, and Honored Scientist of Russia, Roza Nurgalieвна Ismagilova is a leading Russian Africanist who has devoted 75 years of her life to African studies. Her field of work focuses on ethnic issues, as well as traditional political and sociocultural institutions and their role in modern society. She has published over 300 scholarly works, including such seminal works as the two-volume encyclopedic dictionary “Africa,” “Society and State in Tropical Africa,” and a five-volume work on African culture. Her monograph “Ethiopia: Features of Federalism” has been praised by experts as a truly encyclopedic work. Her books have been translated into foreign languages and published in the United States, France, Germany, Italy, China, and several African countries.

R.N. Ismagilova has worked at many centers for African studies, but her permanent position from its inception to this day has been at the Institute for African Studies. She not only witnessed but also actively participated in the emergence of the leading think tank for African studies in Russia, played a part in its development, experienced its crises and challenges alongside it, and continues to be actively involved in its academic life. In this interview, she discusses the development of Russian African studies and its key milestones, the fieldwork conducted by Africanist anthropologists, her personal expedition experiences, and the leading academic schools and Africanists worldwide. Particular attention is given to the different understandings of the concept of nation in the Soviet ethnographic school and in Western anthropological research.

Keywords: social anthropology, ethnography, interethnic relations, traditional social institutions, Soviet African studies, Russian African studies, Institute for African Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences

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– **Roza Nurgalieвна, before proceeding to your recollections of the past days of the Institute for African Studies, I'd like to ask you a very personal question. Could you explain how a daughter of geologists, whom life had brought to Uzbekistan in the 1940s, came to study Africa, a continent the perception of which in the Soviet Union was extremely vague until the mid-1950s?**

– It was unexpected. After finishing high school in Tashkent, I was planning to enroll at the Moscow Aviation Institute. It was 1944, during World War II, and this renowned university had been evacuated to the capital of Uzbekistan. I was ready to apply, but a friend convinced me to go to Tashkent University to meet Professor Mikhail Evgenievich Masson, a renowned archaeologist who had led excavations in Khorezm. His enthusiasm for the research activity inspired me, so I decided to enroll in the Faculty of History at Tashkent University. I remember approaching Mikhail Evgenievich and telling him I wanted to become an archaeologist. He looked at me—a frail, thin girl—and said, “No, I won’t take you. You’ll be shielding your little nose from the sun with a leaf and be scared to ride a donkey.” However, this didn’t discourage me, and I enrolled in the Faculty of History.

During the war, many Soviet intellectuals, including scientists and writers, as well as theaters and the Moscow Conservatory, were evacuated to Tashkent. Prominent literary figures were among them, including A.A. Akhmatova, A.N. Tolstoy, K.M. Simonov, and K.I. Chukovsky. My colleagues and I attended their recitals, music concerts, and theater performances. All of this played a significant role in shaping our personalities. The “*crème de la crème*” of Soviet historical science was evacuated to the Central Asian University in Tashkent¹, which naturally affected the quality of our education.

After graduating from university in 1950, I entered the postgraduate school. My academic supervisor was Professor Grigory Lvovich Bondarevsky. Since I had chosen the Mau Mau² uprising in Kenya as my dissertation topic, he advised me to go to Moscow to the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences³, where there was an African sector. This is what I did.

When I arrived at the Institute to meet with the head of the sector, Ivan Izosimovich Potekhin, I timidly asked how to find him. “Oh, there he is, with the smoking pipe.” When he found out that I was from Tashkent and that even there we were dealing with African issues so close to him, he seemed pleased and became my academic supervisor. My other supervisor was the renowned ethnographer, Sergei Alexandrovich Tokarev.

I successfully defended my dissertation, “The Peoples of Kenya under the Colonial Regime” [Ismagilova 1955] and was accepted to work at the Institute of Ethnography. I was fortunate to have such excellent advisors, and I am proud to be their student. Working with them, I gained not only knowledge but also a wealth of life experience. At that time, the Institute of Ethnography was a unique academic institution. World-renowned scholars, such as the anthropologist Georgy Frantsevich Debets⁴, the

¹ The National University of Uzbekistan, named after Mirzo Ulugbek, is one of the largest and oldest higher education institutions in Uzbekistan and the first Soviet university in Central Asia. Until 1960, it was known as the Central Asian State University (CASU).

² An uprising in the 1950s by the peoples of Kenya, primarily the Kikuyu, but also the Embu and Meru, against the British practice of seizing land from Africans.

³ Now the N.N. Miklouho-Maclay Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology.

⁴ Georgy Frantsevich Debets (1905–1969) was a Soviet anthropologist, Doctor of Biological Sciences, Professor. His primary research focused on race studies, ethnic anthropology, paleoanthropology, and anthropogenesis, as well as on the anthropological composition of the peoples inhabiting the USSR. He organized and participated in numerous anthropological and archaeological expeditions covering the central regions of Russia, Siberia,

archaeologist Sergei Pavlovich Tolstov⁵, and the ethnographer Mark Osipovich Kosven⁶, worked there. They had a profound influence on my development as a scholar.

– **Could you provide an example of your mentors’ teaching methods?**

– I don’t remember any specific “methods,” but their conscientious approach to work and kindness towards colleagues were a great learning experience for me. I once offered to proofread Sergei Alexandrovich’s report manuscript, to which he replied, “Thank you, but I always do it myself. It’s a very important stage. It’s precisely at this stage that mistakes can creep in.” I’ve remembered that for the rest of my life and try to follow his example.

Here’s another instructive case. I was tasked with reviewing an article by a renowned journalist. It was full of errors, some of which were downright stupid, so I wrote a scathing review. After reading it, Ivan Izosimovich said, “You can’t do that! Your job isn’t to prove the author wrong but to help them understand the topic. There shouldn’t be any hurtful words.” He made me rewrite the text twice. This was an important lesson for me.

– **Let’s return to African studies, though. As far as I understand, there have always been individual scholars studying the continent in Russia, but was there a specialized research center?**

– This center originated from the African sector at the Institute of Ethnography, which was established in 1946. Professor Eleonora Sergeevna Lvova described in detail its work at the international conference “The Study of Africa in Russia and Abroad: Stages, Trends, Prospects” (Moscow, November 23–24, 2011) [Lvova 2012].

The sector was headed by Dmitry Alekseevich Olderogge and Ivan Izosimovich Potekhin. Their research primarily focused on the study of African peoples—their history, traditional culture, customs and rituals, and national liberation movements. Several fundamental books were published. Among them, the monograph titled “Peoples of Africa” [Olderogge, Potekhin 1954] from the multi-volume series “Peoples of the World”⁷ undoubtedly ranks first. It covers a broad range of topics, including the

Chukotka, Kamchatka, the Far East, Central Asia, the Caucasus, Finland, and Afghanistan. He collected and studied extensive anthropological material on the ancient population of the USSR. He developed a number of anthropological research methods, including craniological ones. He emphasized the importance of anthropological material as a historical source.

⁵ Sergei Pavlovich Tolstov (1907–1976) was a Soviet historian, ethnographer, archaeologist. He specialized in the history of the peoples of Central Asia and the history, ethnogenesis, and culture of the Karakalpak people; became the discoverer of the ancient Khorezmian civilization. S.P. Tolstov headed the Institute of Ethnography and the Institute of Oriental Studies; was a Corresponding Member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, a Corresponding Member of the GDR Academy of Sciences, an Honorary Member of the Uzbek SSR Academy of Sciences, a Corresponding Member of the Asiatic Society in Paris, the Paris Anthropological Society, the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, the Archaeological Department of India, the Italian Institute of the Middle and Far East, the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, and several other international academic institutions.

⁶ Mark Osipovich Kosven (1885–1967) was a Russian and Soviet historian and ethnographer, Doctor of Historical Sciences, professor, who specialized in the history of prehistory, matriarchy, patriarchy, the early forms of marriage, the family community, the historiography of prehistory, and the history of the ethnographic study of the Caucasus. In Caucasian studies, he pioneered the exploration of such issues as dual organization, tribal structure, atalykism, kunachestvo, and others, using materials from the peoples of the Caucasus.

⁷ “Peoples of the World. Ethnographic Essays” is an anthology of the N.N. Miklouho-Maclay Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences, edited by S.P. Tolstov, professor, Corresponding Member of the USSR Academy of Sciences. It was published by Nauka Publishing House from 1954 to 1966.

ethnogenesis of African peoples, the history of material and spiritual culture, the ethnolinguistic situation, and family relations. This book, a kind of encyclopedia, played a vital role in the development of Soviet African studies, and it remains relevant today. I am proud that my contribution was included in this publication.

– The rise of the African independence movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and Africa’s transition from being an object of imperialist policy to a subject of international politics, led to a surge of interest in Africa in the Soviet Union. This resulted in the establishment of the Institute for African Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences in 1959. As someone who witnessed and participated in these events, we would greatly appreciate your insights on this important period.

– On October 2, 1959, Academician A.N. Nesmeyanov, the President of the USSR Academy of Sciences, signed the Resolution of the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences on the establishment of the Institute for African Studies.

However, this event had a prehistory. In autumn 1958, W. Dubois, a prominent scholar and public figure in African and American studies, visited Moscow. During a meeting with him, I.I. Potekhin discussed the plan for establishing the Institute and its future activities. The outcome of this discussion was a memo from I.I. Potekhin to the CPSU Central Committee entitled “Proposals for the Scientific Study of Africa in the USSR.” In January 1959, W. Dubois was received by N.S. Khrushchev, and at this meeting he proposed to N.S. Khrushchev the establishment of an Institute for the study of African history and culture [Dubois 1968]. On July 2, 1959, the CPSU Central Committee adopted a resolution on the establishment of the Institute for African Studies. It appointed I.I. Potekhin as director, allocated 1,000 square meters of office space, established a staff of 50 researchers, and provided funding for the purchase of academic literature for the Institute. The appointment of Ivan Izosimovich as the head of the newly formed Institute was a significant decision, given that he was indeed a renowned scholar in African Studies [Vasiliev 2003].

I vaguely remember the small room in central Moscow where the Institute was located in its early days. It was there that the first research areas were developed and the research team was formed. We, the staff of the African Sector of the Institute of Ethnography, formed the core of the Institute. Later, we were joined by colleagues from the African Department of the Institute of Oriental Studies, headed by Irina Pavlovna Yastrebova, who later became the Deputy Director of the newly formed Institute.

Sometime later, the Institute for African Studies was allocated a beautiful mansion in the center of Moscow (16 Starokonyushenny Lane). The scholar and organizational routine began, with the foremost issue being the staffing of the new institution. By September 1960, the Institute employed 50 people, including one Doctor of Sciences, Director I.I. Potekhin, and several Candidates of Sciences. By mid-1962, the number of scholar staff had increased to almost two hundred.

In the Institute’s early years, the team published about fifty scholar works. These included the two-volume encyclopedic reference book “Africa” [Potekhin 1963], “Africa. 1956–1961”, “African Collection. History”, “African Collection. Economics”, the books by V.V. Bogoslovsky “US Policy in Africa”, M.I. Braginsky “The Liberation of Africa”, N.I. Gavrilov “The Guinean Republic”, A.Z. Zusmanovich “The Imperialist Partition of the Congo Basin (1876–1894)”, I.I. Potekhin “Africa Looks to the Future”, V.A. Subbotin “French Colonial Expansion at the End of the 19th Century”, Z.I. Tokareva “The Togolese Republic”, P.N. Tretyakov “Economic Independence and

Two Types of Aid to African Countries”, M.Yu. Frenkel “The USA and Liberia. The Negro Problem in the USA and the Formation of the Republic of Liberia”, B.I. Sharevskaya’s “Old and New Religions of Tropical and Southern Africa”; collections of “Constitutions of African Countries”, books such as “Literature of African Countries” [Breskina 1962], “The Newest History of African Countries”, “New Forms of Colonialism”, my book “The Peoples of Nigeria” [Ismagilova 1963], and others.

Such scholarly activity and thematic range, the breadth of topic coverage and the depth of analysis demonstrated the Soviet scholar community’s sincere and vibrant interest in the African continent and its problems, and a fervent desire to understand them and find solutions. I believe these works remain relevant to this day, providing a solid foundation for our African studies.

– As I understand it, there was a severe lack of reliable information about Africa at the time. How did you, as scholars dedicated to studying this continent, fill in this gap?

– The Institute attached especial importance to inviting African scholars. The main purpose of these visits was not only to familiarize the guests with the achievements of our science but also to gain information about the scientific research paths of our colleagues in Africa and to develop topics for joint research. In the 1960s, the Institute hosted delegations of scholars from Guinea, Madagascar, Sudan, and the Academies of Sciences of East African countries, Ghana, Mali, Somalia, Ethiopia, the Republic of Togo, and Tanzania. Almost all of Africa’s major public and political figures at the time visited the Institute, providing extensive material for analysis.

We also took every opportunity to visit the countries we were researching. For example, I based my monograph, “The Peoples of Nigeria: Ethnic Composition and Brief Ethnographic Characteristics” [Ismagilova 1963], on an analysis of the Nigerian population census. However, since we lacked information on a number of the country’s provinces, the Institute offered me the opportunity to work as an interpreter for a trade fair in Nigeria, which I did. For a whole month, I worked at the exhibition stand, interacting extensively with visitors and gathering material. And in the evenings, I studied at the library, which the Nigerians had granted me access to outside normal hours at the request of the Soviet embassy. Although the heat was unbearable and living conditions were spartan, the purpose of the trip was accomplished. I had collected the missing information for my monograph.

Fieldwork, or collecting data in the countries under study, is an integral part of the research. As the Institute didn’t have sufficient funds to organize such trips, we took every opportunity to visit Africa. In total, I conducted fieldwork and observations in 24 countries on the continent. I visited Nigeria eight times and Uganda three times. The first African countries I visited were Senegal and Ghana: I visited them with a tour group in 1961. I also traveled to Nigeria and Mali with tour groups. I also travelled numerous times as part of delegations from public organizations, such as the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies, the Soviet Women’s Committee, and the Soviet Committee for Solidarity of Asian and African Countries. As part of these delegations, I visited Senegal, Nigeria, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Uganda, and Congo-Brazzaville.

As a rule, we met with heads of state and leaders of ruling parties. I always used these meetings to gain a better understanding of the ethno-political situation, so I had to ask “uncomfortable questions.” I often encountered criticism from the heads of delegations later on, but I brought back invaluable information for scholarly analysis from my trips.

My work at UNESCO was particularly instrumental in shaping my subsequent research. In 1964, as part of a UNESCO mission, I participated in a study on the role of native languages. In this group, I represented the socialist countries, while Maurice Hurel from France represented the capitalist countries, and Nigerian professor Lasebikan represented Africa. We spent three months working in Niger, Nigeria, and Uganda. Constant communication in foreign languages with strangers was challenging, but the experience yielded a wealth of materials.

– Which of your field trips do you consider the most productive?

– Undoubtedly, it was my participation in the Russian historical and ethnosociological expedition to Ethiopia in 1992. My main objective was to study the role of traditional institutions, including castes, in modern society. We collected truly unique material, which was used in subsequent research. As well as working in the capital and other large cities, we worked in villages, learning about the daily lives, traditions and worldviews of the local populations. For me, as an ethnographer, this was extremely valuable. In the Jimma area, I had the opportunity to meet representatives of the Fuga caste, and in Jimma itself, I conducted surveys in schools and colleges. The questionnaires included many questions about interethnic relations, self-identification, family relationships, and other aspects of the students' lives. The students had never seen a Soviet person before and were eager to ask me about the Soviet Union. I remember a little girl stroking my hand; my white skin was unusual to her.

The expedition's findings led to the publication of the book "Proceedings of the Russian Historical-Ethno-Sociological Expedition to Ethiopia in 1990–1992" [Shauro 1997], Eleonora Sergeevna Lvova's "This Multifaceted Ethiopia. Essays on the History, Culture, and Ethnography of Ethiopia" [Lvova 2009], and other monographs.

Ethiopia has since become a constant source of scholarly fascination for me. Among numerous other publications, I dedicated my 2018 monograph [Ismagilova 2018] to it, as well as my most recent monograph, "Ethiopia: History and Modernity" [Ismagilova 2025], published in 2025, which summarizes decades of research on this African country.

– By the mid-1960s, the scope of Soviet-African cooperation had expanded significantly, thus necessitating a scientific analysis of specific areas of interaction. This, naturally, had a significant impact on the work of the main think tank of Soviet African Studies, namely the Institute for African Studies. On February 12, 1965, the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences discussed the issue "On the Main Research Areas and Measures to Improve the Work of the Institute of African Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences," setting new objectives for the Institute. What impact did this have on the Institute?

– 1965 proved to be a pivotal year in the Institute's history. Its goal was to align scientific research with the practical needs of the state, which was seeking to expand political, economic, and cultural cooperation with African peoples and provide tangible support in overcoming their economic backwardness. The focus shifted towards research on economic, social, and international issues, as well as Soviet-African relations, somewhat relegating historical and socio-anthropological research to the background. Our scientific work became more applied: we prepared research and analytical reports for party and government organizations.

The comprehensive nature of the study of Africa was dictated by practical needs. The Soviet Union's economic, diplomatic, and cultural activities on the African continent

required in-depth, concrete knowledge of natural conditions and resources, the state of productive forces and social relations, the relationships between African peoples, their way of life and spiritual culture, and ideological currents. A large number of researchers began travelling to African countries on research trips, and collaboration with 150 foreign African Studies centers developed. By the mid-1970s, the number of books and brochures published by the Institute had increased exponentially from the previous five years, reaching 5,000.

The interview format does not allow me to list all the books, but I would like to mention a few that I found particularly interesting. These include: “The Economy of Independent African Countries” by V.G. Solodovnikov, I.A. Svanidze, and A.A. Demidova [Solodovnikov, Svanidze, Demidova 1972], “Problems of Planning and Development of Agriculture in African Countries” by N.I. Gavrilov [Gavrilov 1973], “Problems of Modern Africa” by V.G. Solodovnikov [Solodovnikov 1973], “The New Scramble for Africa. Problems of inter-imperialist struggle in the liberated countries of the continent” by E.A. Tarabrin [Tarabrin 1972], the collective monograph “The policy of imperialist powers in Africa at the turn of the 1970s” [Kolker 1973], the six-volume series on economic sectors “Productive forces” [Goncharov 1978], which included books on agriculture, mining and oil production, transport and communications, as well as on other economic spheres of the economies of African countries.

– **Among these books, I would like to mention yours, which is about ethnic processes in tropical Africa [Ismagilova 1973], which was also published in English [Ismagilova 1978]. It is therefore unsurprising that professor Irina Ivanovna Filatova called it “the most significant and first comprehensive work in global African studies” [Filatova 2022].**

– I wrote it based on my doctoral dissertation, “Ethnic Problems of Modern Tropical Africa,” which I defended in 1972, when I was 44 years old. At that time, it was unusual for someone to become a Doctor of Sciences at such a young age. But I had truly unique opponents: the Africanist Dmitry Alekseevich Olderogge, the ethnographer Sergei Aleksandrovich Tokarev, and the political scientist Georgy Ilyich Mirsky. My research was the first to analyze the common and specific features of the ethno-cultural development of African peoples, the causes of interethnic contradictions and conflicts, develop a typology of ethnic processes, and express a viewpoint on possible paths and methods for resolving ethnic problems. I attempted to provide a reasoned critique of the concept of a “single nation” as an ethno-social organism, which formed the basis of national policy in a number of African states, and the danger of this concept in the context of the multiethnic populations of most countries on the continent. The book was included on the list of required reading at several universities in the USSR and other socialist countries.

– **At the same time, during the second half of the 1970s, the leadership of the Institute changed, and the Institute itself moved to a new address, didn’t it?**

– Yes, that’s how it happened, but some clarification is needed. The serious illness of the first Institute’s director, Ivan Izosimovich Potekhin, raised the question of new leadership for the Institute. Vasily Grigoryevich Solodovnikov was appointed to this post. He headed the Institute for over ten years, but in 1976 he was sent as the Soviet ambassador to Zambia, and Anatoly Andreevich Gromyko, Doctor of Historical Sciences and Professor, then took over as head of the Institute.

In 1979, the Institute moved to a new building located on Aleksey Tolstoy Street (now Spiridonovka). Built in 1910 by the renowned Russian architect I.V. Zholtovsky for Gavriil Tarasov, the head of a trading firm, this is one of the most beautiful mansions in old Moscow. The interiors were decorated by the renowned artists I.I. Nivinsky and E.E. Lanceray. Every time I enter this building, I feel deep gratitude to A.A. Gromyko, who assigned me a room on the very top floor, saying, “Roza, you will find it very peaceful here. No boss will want to climb such a steep staircase.” He was right. I still work in this office, surrounded by flowers.

During A.A. Gromyko’s sixteen-year directorship (1976–1992), the Institute made significant progress in its research activities. The Institute’s connections with Africanists from many countries were expanded and deepened, thereby significantly enhancing its reputation and status. The work of the Institute’s staff was repeatedly recognized by the government and the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences. In celebration of the Institute’s 25th anniversary, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, by decree of October 1, 1984, awarded the Institute’s staff with orders and medals “for their significant contribution to the study of Africa and the organization of scientific research.” I was honored with the Order of Friendship of Peoples.

For me, Anatoly Andreevich’s leadership was a “golden age.” He established the National and Cultural Problems sector, which ran successfully from 1979 to 1998, and appointed me as its head. Together, we prepared the book “Society and State in Tropical Africa” [Gromyko 1980c]. In just under 20 years, the sector has published 27 monographs, including several fundamental studies, such as “Traditional and Syncretic Religions of Africa” [Ismagilova 1986] and a five-volume series on African culture entitled “Ethnic Contradictions and Conflicts in Africa” [Ismagilova 1980], “Separatist Movements in Ethiopia” [Krylov 1985], “The Ethnic Factor in the Political Life of African States” [Ismagilova 1990], and “Socio- and Ethno-cultural Processes in Modern Africa” [Ismagilova 1992]. The book “Ethno-cultural Development of African Countries” was published in Portuguese, English, and French.

During the intense bipolar confrontation of the 1970s and 1980s, the Institute’s work was centered on the Marxist-Leninist concept of development in former colonies. This involved identifying the patterns and characteristics of their transition to a non-capitalist path and achieving economic independence, and developing a theoretical foundation for the USSR’s relations with newly liberated African countries, taking into account their growing role in global development. Surprisingly, I believe that such research remains relevant today. Equally relevant today are the Institute’s studies of the characteristics of imperialist policy towards African countries, neocolonialism in its various forms and manifestations, and the elimination of the consequences of colonialism.

For instance, the monograph “Africa in the 1970s–80s: Formation of the National Economy and Development Strategy” [Gromyko 1980a], prepared through the joint efforts of Institute’s staff and scientists from Bulgaria and East Germany, can be cited as an example. Other examples include books such as “Foreign Concepts of the Economic Development of African Countries. Critical Analysis” [Gromyko 1980b], “Africa in the Struggle for International Economic Reconstruction” [Gromyko 1985]. Additionally, L.V. Goncharova’s “Export of Capital to Developing Countries of Africa” [Goncharov 1975], V.S. Baskin’s “Capitalist “Aid” to Developing Countries: Mechanisms, Characteristics and Directions of Impact on African Countries” [Baskin 1982] are also worth mentioning.

– **The 1990s and early 2000s were challenging years for the Institute...**

– The entire country was going through a major transitional period, which naturally affected the Institute's activities. As a result, several departments were closed down, and research on topics that were not considered particularly relevant at the time was discontinued. Regional studies remained a priority, with significant attention being paid to the study of various aspects of ethnicity, including numerous ethnic conflicts. An analysis of the situation in several African countries revealed the active politicization of the ethnic factor, echoing the problems that Russia was experiencing. These issues were reflected in a number of publications, including "Essays on the National Question in South Africa" [Ismagilova 1997].

The Institute's work has shifted its focus to conflict potential. African regional conflicts and Russia's role in resolving them have been analyzed. While requiring further refinement and clarification, scholars have demonstrated that the Russian concept of national security can also be applied in Africa, which remains a zone of ongoing conflict. These issues are addressed, in particular, in the works of V.P. Terin "Reorientation: Global Dimensions of African Conflicts" [Terin 1996], and D.V. Polikanov "Conflicts in Africa and the Activities of International Organizations to Resolve Them" [Polikanov 1998].

The new world realities have attracted the attention of our scholars, as evidenced by such monographs as "The New World Order and Problems of African Security" [Lileev 1994], "Problems of African Security and Russia's Position" [Deich, Kukushkin, Lileev 1996].

In 1992, staff of the Institute elected a new director at a general meeting: Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor Alexei Mikhailovich Vasiliev. To his credit, during the difficult 1990s, when many organizations could not withstand the new conditions and disappeared, the Institute survived under his leadership.

In 1998, the Institute adopted a new organizational structure, replacing sectors and departments with research centers based on problem-specific and geographical criteria. Most importantly, however, was the enthusiasm of the Institute's staff, who, despite modest salaries and a lack of visible recognition for their work, continued to dedicate themselves to their beloved study of African issues.

Under the editorship of A.M. Vasiliev, the series "Some Aspects of Economic Liberalization in Africa" was published [Pozdnyakova 1999, Roshchin 1999], and books by M.M. Golansky "The Rise and Fall of the Global Economy. What Awaits the Lagging Countries" [Golansky 1999], V.D. Chernikov "Problems of Transition to a Market Economy in Pre-Market Countries. The Experience of Egypt and Sudan" [Chernikov 1997], V.V. Pavlova "Africa: State and Market" [Pavlova 1997], the collection "Africa and the Second World War" [Zotova 1996], the collective monograph "Africa: Multivariate Development" [Kosukhin 1997], the two-volume encyclopedia "Africa" [Vasiliev 2010], and many others were published. Thus, the Africanist school of thought continued to thrive, even in the most challenging conditions.

– **Today, the Institute for African Studies appears noticeably rejuvenated and enthusiastic, with a stronger presence in Russia's academic, political, and media spheres. When did this revival begin?**

– In 2015, Irina Olegovna Abramova, Doctor of Economics, Professor, Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and member of the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences, became the new director. She is a

brilliant and persistent researcher, the author of over a hundred works published in Russia and abroad. She is actively involved in organizing the Russia-Africa summits.

Irina Olegovna is a talented organizer. From her very first years as director, she has focused her efforts on attracting young people. Her efforts were successful: the Institute now employs approximately forty people under 40. Consequently, the Institute's scholarly and creative activity is growing with the addition of young staff.

– Roza Nurgalieвна, you have worked as a researcher and lectured at African studies centers in the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, Sweden, the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, China, Japan, Cuba, and Nigeria. Which of these institutions, in your opinion, most closely resembles the Russian institute?

– It's unlike any other research center I've ever worked at. Not a single one! Foreign African Studies centers are usually affiliated with universities, and their staff typically doesn't exceed 20 people. Moreover, they combine their work at the center with teaching. In 2025, the Institute for African Studies had a total staff of 150, 120 of whom were researchers. The Institute comprises 11 research centers: the Center for Global and Strategic Studies, the Center for the Study of Transitional Economies, the Center for the Study of Russian-African Relations and African Foreign Policy, the Center for the Study of North Africa and the Horn of Africa, the Center for the Study of Sub-Saharan Africa, the Center for History and Cultural Anthropology, the Center for Scientific Information and International Relations, the Center for Sociological and Political Studies, the Center for Civilizational and Regional Studies, the Center for the Study of BRICS African Strategy, and the Gender Studies Group. There's nothing like this anywhere! I am particularly pleased with the distinct structure of the Anthropology Center.

Of all the international academic institutions, I would probably single out the Center for African Studies in Leiden, the Netherlands. It has an excellent library, which includes every journal on Africa from the very first issue⁸.

– Which foreign scholars in African studies have you met?

– Throughout my life, I have been fortunate to meet many outstanding social anthropologists, including the South African Meyer Fortes (1906–1983), the French Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009), Germaine Dieterlen (1903–1999), Geneviève Calame-Griaule (1924–2013), and Georges Balandier (1920–2016), and the Italian Lanfranco Ricci (1916–2007). I have met many outstanding scholars selflessly devoted to the study of Africa along my long journey. Sadly, most of them have passed away, but they left a lasting mark on science. In their research, they provided detailed descriptions of ethnogenesis, housing types, occupations, family and marital relations, and customs and rituals.

Contemporary social anthropologists differ significantly from their predecessors in their focus on issues related to ethno-political situations in African states, inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts, their causes, and modern and traditional methods for resolving them. The roots of the current ethno-political situation in many countries can be traced back to the colonial period, when colonial borders were drawn up in a way that cut across unified ethnic groups. A notable example is the Somaliland, which is split between Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Djibouti. Plans to establish a Greater Somalia remain on the agenda, leading to highly tense relations.

⁸ *African Studies Centre Leiden*. <https://ascleiden.nl/> (accessed: 01.12.2025)

– How significant was the difference in the approaches to socio-anthropological problems between Soviet and Western scholars?

– Western scholars consider “nationalism” to be an ideology of national liberation struggle. Russian scholars attach a purely negative connotation to this concept, characterizing it as a manifestation of superiority and national exclusivity. In order to avoid terminological misunderstandings in conversations with both Western and African scholars, I used the term “tribalism” to describe inter-tribal conflicts.

According to Russian scholars, a nation is defined as an ethno-social category, while in the West it is often synonymous with the term “state.” Regarding ethnic processes, both Western and Russian scholars divide them into assimilation—natural and forced—consolidation, and integration.

We define a nation as a historically established, the highest form of ethnic community, characterized by the unity of territory, economy, language, culture, national identity, and common interests. We distinguish between an *ethnic nation* (a community of people with common roots) and a *civic nation* (a community of people united by citizenship of a particular country).

During the Soviet era, the division of ethnic communities into “nations,” “nationalities,” and “tribes” was widely used in scholarship. These terms were associated with specific socio-political systems: “nation” corresponded to socialism and capitalism, “nationality” to feudalism, and “tribe” to primitive communal systems. However, over time, this system of classification lost its relevance. The term “nationality” fell out of use. It truly defines nothing. Nevertheless, journalists continue to use it frequently.

The influence of the Soviet ethnographic school surprisingly manifested itself in the drafting of Ethiopia’s 1995 constitution, which divides all Ethiopian ethnic groups into “nations,” “nationalities,” and “peoples.” Moreover, membership in a particular administrative unit depends on this: nations are assigned to regions (states), nationalities to zones, and peoples to a lower administrative category—woredas.

My research demonstrates that such a division of ethnic communities exacerbates the ethno-political situation, as it is viewed as discriminatory. Moreover, each administrative unit contains “titular” and “non-titular” peoples. This further complicates the situation.

However, this is a topic for another discussion.

The interview was conducted by Yu.D. Kryuchkov

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Интервью

АФРИКАНИСТИКА И ЭТНОГРАФИЯ В 1960–1990-е гг.: СМЕНА ВЕХ

Интервью с Р.Н. Исмагиловой, Институт Африки РАН

Социальный антрополог, доктор исторических наук, профессор, заслуженный деятель науки России Роза Нургалиевна Исмагилова – старейший российский африканист, посвятивший изучению Африканского континента 75 лет. Она занимается анализом этнических проблем, а также изучением традиционных политических и социокультурных институтов и их роли в современном обществе. Ею опубликовано более 300 научных работ, среди которых такие фундаментальные труды, как 2-томный энциклопедический словарь «Африка», «Общество и государство в Тропической Африке», пятитомник по культуре Африки. Ее монография «Эфиопия. Особенности федерализма» получила высокую оценку специалистов как поистине энциклопедический труд. Ее книги переведены на иностранные языки, изданы в США, Франции, Германии, Италии, Китае, ряде стран Африки.

Р.Н. Исмагилова работала во многих центрах африканистики, но постоянным местом ее работы с момента его возникновения и по сей день является Институт Африки. Она была не только свидетелем, но и активным участником зарождения главного мозгового центра африканистики в России, участвовала в его становлении, переживала вместе с ним его кризисы и проблемы и продолжает активно участвовать в его научной жизни. В своем интервью она рассказывает о становлении отечественной африканистики и ее ключевых вехах, о проведении полевых исследований африканистами-антропологами, личном экспедиционном опыте, о ведущих научных школах и африканистах мира. Особое внимание уделяется различным пониманиям концепта нация в советской этнографической школе и в западных антропологических исследованиях.

Ключевые слова: социальная антропология, этнография, межэтнические отношения, традиционные социальные институты, советская африканистика, российская африканистика, Институт Африки РАН

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FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGES OF OUR TIME

Research article

FAR, FAR AWAY, ON LAKE CHAD... THE DECLINE OF MILITARY-POLITICAL COOPERATION BETWEEN FRANCE AND THE REPUBLIC OF CHAD

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Abstract. The author's focus is on the evolution of relations between France and the Republic of Chad during the presidency of Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno. The article emphasizes the military cooperation between the Fifth Republic and this African country. It notes that since Idriss Déby (the father of the current president) came to power, he has consistently enjoyed the patronage of the Élysée Palace. All these years, the "Françafrique" military-political system has provided not only political cover for the authoritarian regime of the Déby clan but also military and economic assistance to it during periods of acute political crises. The coming to power of the son of the president, who had been killed in a battle with the rebels, led to a rapid cooling of relations between Paris and N'Djamena. Both objective and subjective causes of the crisis in the interaction between the two countries and the reasons for the sharp cooling of relations between N'Djamena and Paris are analyzed in the paper. The objective factors include deep geopolitical transformations in Africa, the emergence of new players on the continent, primarily China, as well as the return of the Russian Federation to the continent. The analysis shows that during the presidency of Macron, France lost all or part of its influence in the Central African Republic, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Gabon, while in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, socio-political cataclysms had occurred that deformed relations with the former metropolis. The subjective factors that led to the conflict between Chad and France include the prosecution of Mahamat Déby for a number of financial abuses and the interpersonal conflict between the presidents of the Fifth Republic and the Republic of Chad. The paper argues that Chad's and Senegal's refusal of military cooperation with France and the liquidation of the French military base in Côte d'Ivoire actually marked the end of the collapse of the Françafrique neo-colonial system.

Keywords: Republic of Chad, France, Françafrique, military bases, withdrawal of French troops, Mahamat Déby, Emmanuel Macron

Conflict of interest: The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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FAREWELL TO *FRANÇAFRIQUE*

In late November 2024, French media reported that the Republic of Chad had terminated the defense cooperation agreement with the French Republic signed on September 5, 2019¹. Chadian President Mahamat Idriss Déby described the military cooperation agreement with France as “obsolete” and stated that the decision to end military cooperation with Paris was “a sovereign act carefully thought out.”² He also expressed his gratitude to France for its cooperation and declared his readiness to engage in constructive dialogue to explore new forms of partnership³.

Almost simultaneously, the President of Senegal, Bassirou Diomaye Diakhar Faye, declared that all Paris-controlled military bases in his country would be transferred to Dakar’s control by the summer of 2025⁴. Jumping ahead of the story, let us also note that on January 1, 2025, the Ivorian President, Alassane Dramane Ouattara, delivered a New Year’s address to the nation in which he also made the following announcement: “We have decided on a coordinated and organized withdrawal of French troops.”⁵ It is important to note that during E. Macron’s presidency, France also lost all or part of its influence in the Central African Republic, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Gabon. Serious socio-political upheavals, which distorted relations with the former metropolis, occurred in Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire [Filippov, Manoylo 2025]. In recent years, the *Françafrique* crisis has received increasingly wider coverage, including in English-language literature, in the context of increasing competition between Western and non-Western actors and the formation of a multipolar world [Lendzoumbou 2025; Lenchie 2025; Ricard, Antouly, Guichaoua 2025; Simura 2024].

These events have had and will have far-reaching consequences in the context of the geopolitical situation on the African continent and the role of the Fifth Republic in establishing new relations between the countries of the Sahel and Central Africa and external players in the African arena. The refusal of Chad and Senegal to cooperate militarily with France effectively marked the collapse of the neocolonial *Françafrique* system. The fact is that the Fifth Republic’s military presence remains only in Djibouti (with a troop contingent of 1,700 personnel) and Gabon (with approximately 350 troops stationed there)⁶. However, in addition to France, several other countries, including the United States, China, Italy, Spain, Germany, and Japan, maintain outposts in Djibouti⁷. This fact significantly devalues the significance of the Fifth Republic’s military base in this small country, which, due to its unique geographical location, is strategically vital.

¹ Afrique : le Tchad rompt ses accords de coopération de défense avec la France. *Le Figaro avec AFP*. 29.11.2024. <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20241129-le-tchad-annonce-rompre-ses-accords-de-coop%C3%A9ration-de-d%C3%A9fense-avec-paris-un-tournant-historique> (accessed: 01.10.2025)

² Tasamba J. Chad says military cooperation agreement with France ‘obsolete’. *Türkiye’s Global News Agency Anadolu Ajansı*. 02.12.2024. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/chad-says-military-cooperation-agreement-with-france-obsolete-/3410534> (accessed: 08.11.2025)

³ Chad has terminated its military cooperation agreement with France. *RIA Novosti*. 29.11.20.24. (In Russ.). <https://ria.ru/20241129/chad-1986350480.html> (accessed: 01.10.2025)

⁴ The President of Senegal announced the termination of foreign military presence. *TASS*. 31.12.2024. (In Russ.). <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/22809287> (accessed: 13.10.2025)

⁵ Ivorian president announces withdrawal of French troops in January. *Xinhua News Agency*. 02.01.2025. <https://english.news.cn/20250102/6c908c2ed76049f9b73c52e9654b41ce/c.html> (accessed: 01.02.2025)

⁶ Mamontov S. French fighter jets left Chad. *RIA Novosti*. 10.12.2024. (In Russ.). <https://ria.ru/20241210/chad-1988421218.html> (accessed: 13.10.2025)

⁷ Why are there 11 foreign military bases located in Djibouti? What’s so special about this tiny state? *The World of Science*. 02.07.2023. (In Russ.). <https://dzen.ru/a/Z7TQI7PxFm71LPJS> (accessed: 26.07.2025)

And Gabon, in April 2024, announced the revision of military agreements with France and the closure of the French military base in Libreville. The few remaining military instructors will only train Gabonese soldiers [Filippov 2023].

The dramatic shift in cooperation with France in the Sahel and Central African countries that experienced military coups with pronounced anti-colonialist overtones is understandable, as is the change in alignment in countries where democratic elections had taken place and new governments were following the general trend of recent decolonization. But why, seemingly for no apparent reason, did Chad suddenly choose to remove French soldiers from its territory?

BELLUM OMNIUM CONTRA OMNES

The authoritative Russian scholars in African Studies, T.S. Denisova and S.V. Kostelyanets, made the unfortunate observation for Paris: “After gaining political independence on August 11, 1960, the Republic of Chad found itself in a state of permanent military-political crisis—between the end of one conflict and the beginning of another” [Denisova, Kostelyanets 2022]. The concept of the social philosophy of a “war of all against all” (*Bellum omnium contra omnes*) is an idea of a state of society in which there is universal, permanent hostility and incessant mutual violence [Hobbes 2010]. This concept, proposed by the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, perfectly describes the state of Chadian society at all stages of its sovereign existence.

The socio-political history of the Republic of Chad is characterized by an endless confrontation between the ruling elite [Mosca 1939] and the armed opposition, which most often did not set ideological or political goals but destabilized the state, compelling the government to make various concessions [Africa 2020].

Nevertheless, since the collapse of the French colonial empire in the early 1960s, Chad has consistently served as a staunch ally of the Fifth Republic (if one can speak so of the vassal relationship between a “great power” and an African country dependent on it in everything). In the 2010s, Chad’s value in the eyes of Western countries increased significantly: “President Y. Déby⁸ was regarded by the European Union, primarily France, as a reliable ally in the fight against terrorism on the African continent” [Denisova, Kostelyanets 2022]. Moreover, this politician was perceived in the West as a barrier to the spread of Chinese and Russian influence in the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. It should be noted that Y. Déby understood this perfectly well and, at every opportunity, exploited the well-known dependence of French politics on special relations with his country. During his time as president, these relations were quite materialistic and pragmatic in nature.

Let’s consider one example. On July 2, 2017, E. Macron arrived in Bamako to participate in a meeting of the heads of state of the five members of the regional security initiative, the “G5 Sahel.”⁹ The Élysée Palace hoped that “partner states will eventually

⁸ Idriss Déby Itno was the 5th President of the Republic of Chad (December 2, 1990 – April 20, 2021).

⁹ The establishment of the G5 Sahel was inspired by Paris in 2015. A joint military group was formed in February 2017. The stated goal of this military-political structure was to combat Islamist terrorism in the region. Following the establishment of the Sahel Alliance and the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from the initiative, the remaining countries (Mauritania and Chad) announced in December 2023 that they would begin the process of dissolving it.

acquire the capacity to ensure their own security.”¹⁰ According to the official version, the G5S summit was initiated with the aim of “concretely defining its activities.” However, the real reason for the summit was the structural crisis of this project: Chadian President I. Déby had threatened to withdraw from it for economic reasons. Chad’s withdrawal from the G5 Sahel international force did not suit E. Macron at all. As a result, the French government was forced to allocate €2 million to finance the “five” from 2017 to 2022, including €4 million for weapons [Filippov 2022].

The domestic and foreign policy of the Republic of Chad in the postcolonial period has repeatedly attracted the attention of Russian researchers. In this context, the work of E.I. Zhebit, “The Conflict in Chad and the Position of France” [Zhebit 1990], is of particular interest. The dissertation examines the history of Franco-Chadian relations from the moment that the Republic of Chad gained state sovereignty until Idriss Déby took office as the country’s president. S.V. Kostelyanets also addresses the topic of Chad’s participation in the armed conflict in Sudan’s Darfur region in his monograph “Darfur: History of the Conflict” [Kostelyanets 2014] and the article “The Conflict in Sudan’s Darfur Region: Regional Aspect” [Kostelyanets 2015]. Some significant touches to the political portrait of the authoritarian ruler of Chad, I. Déby, are provided in the monograph by T.S. Denisova “Tropical Africa: Evolution of Political Leadership” [Denisova 2016].

The socio-political history of Chad from 1960 to 2010, as well as the armed conflicts in which the country was involved during this period, are the focus of the author’s article “Chad: War of All against All” [Filippov 2016] and the chapter “Why does France need the sands of Chad?” in the monograph “Françafrique: The Shadow of the Élysée Palace over the Black Continent” [Filippov 2017]. Some information on the topics of interest to us is to be found in the reference book by N.V. Vinogradova and L.Yu. Sagoyan “The Republic of Chad” [Vinogradova, Sagoyan 2017]. The role of the army in the socio-political life of the Republic of Chad is examined in the chapter “The Army of Chad” in the collective monograph “Africa: Political Development and the Army” edited by T.S. Denisova [Denisova 2020]. Her articles, co-authored with S.V. Kostelyanets explore the military and political upheavals that have rocked Chad in recent decades [Denisova, Kostelyanets 2021], as well as the army’s special role in the country’s political history [Denisova, Kostelyanets 2022]. The withdrawal of French troops from the Republic of Chad, in the context of the changing political situation in the Sahel, became the focus of K.O. Pikhtov’s work [Pikhtov 2024].

The present article focuses on the current crisis in relations between the Republic of Chad and the French Republic during the presidency of Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno (from 10 October 2022 to the present day).

MAHAMAT IDRIS DEBY – PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CHAD

In April 2021, the father of the current head of state, Idriss Déby Itno, died from wounds sustained during fighting against rebels from the Front for Change and Concord¹¹. He came to power in 1996 with the political support of *Françafrique* and

¹⁰ Opération Barkhane. *Minister des Armées et des Anciens Combattants*. <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/bande-sahelo-saharienne/operation-barkhane> (accessed: 07.11.2025)

¹¹ Chadian President Idriss Deby dies on frontline, rebels vow to keep fighting. *France 24*. 20.04.2021. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210420-chadian-president-idriss-d%C3%A9by-has-died-of-injuries-suffered-on-the-frontline-army> (accessed: 26.07.2025)

since then had enjoyed the unwavering patronage of the Élysée Palace. France provided not only political cover for Déby's regime but also military assistance in critical situations¹². Upon learning of his death, President Emmanuel Macron called on the French to pay tribute to the deceased president as a "courageous friend" of France and a "great soldier"—despite the fact that Déby was one of the African dictators who did not hesitate to resort to large-scale violence and the wholesale destruction of the opposition [Denisova 2016].

For obvious reasons, the Élysée Palace had expressed hope for continued stability in the country and a peaceful transfer of power¹³. In the current situation, it would seem that the optimal option for France was to ensure that the Déby clan remained in power of Chad. This type of "political succession" had previously been used by the Fifth Republic's intelligence services in its dependent African countries to maintain control over the ruling elites. However, times have changed, and, in light of the current deep crisis in *Françafrique*, Mahamat Idriss Déby, the late president's son, is no longer considered the optimal candidate by the Élysée Palace. Furthermore, he proved far less accommodating than his father in his relations with Paris.

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Chad, if the head of state dies, the Speaker of the National Assembly assumes the role of acting president and must initiate the process of preparing for presidential elections within a period of three months¹⁴. However, following the death of I. Déby, a group of high-ranking officers led by M. Déby announced the dissolution of parliament and the termination of the government. The establishment of a transitional military council of 15 senior officers was declared, thereby assuming control of the country without observing any democratic procedures. The council was headed by the son of the deceased president, General M. Déby. On October 8, 2022, the military council was dissolved, and the junta that had seized power proclaimed M. Déby "interim president." However, in the 2024 elections, M. Déby confirmed his status and was declared the winner on May 9, 2024, receiving 61.3% of the vote, while his main opponent, Prime Minister Succès Masra, received 18.53%¹⁵.

It is evident that from the moment of his birth, the son of the late president of the republic belongs to the upper echelons of Chadian society. He received a good education, having completed a course at the Joint Group of Military Schools (*Groupement des Ecoles Militaires Inter-Armées*, GEMIA) in Chad before continuing his studies at the French military school in Aix-en-Provence. M. Déby served in command positions in the security services and armed forces of his country. Since 2006, he has fought against rebels in eastern Chad and in Mali. In 2009, he took an active part (effectively leading government troops) in the Battle of Am Dam. This battle, which took place on May 7, 2009, marked the culmination of the confrontation between the governments armed

¹² Bloch M. La France est intervenue militairement au Tchad cette semaine pour protéger Idriss Déby. *Le Journal du Dimanche*. 07.02.2019. <https://www.lejdd.fr/International/la-france-est-intervenue-militairement-au-tchad-cette-semaine-pour-protoger-idriss-deby-3853610> (accessed: 26.07.2025)

¹³ Chadian President Idriss Deby dies on frontline, rebels vow to keep fighting. *France 24*. 20.04.2021. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210420-chadian-president-idriss-d%C3%A9by-has-died-of-injuries-suffered-on-the-frontline-army> (accessed: 26.07.2025)

¹⁴ Chad President Idriss Deby dies visiting front-line troops: Army. *Al Jazeera*. 04.20.2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/20/chads-president-deby-has-died-of-injuries> (accessed: 26.07.2025)

¹⁵ Donati J. Chad swears in president after disputed election, ending years of military rule. *AP-News*. 24.05.2024. <https://apnews.com/article/election-chad-dispute-terrorism-inauguration-8ecde546c90ea4e74a6fc43b8dbfebb6> (accessed: 26.07.2025)

forces and militants from the Union of Resistance Forces (L'Union des forces de la résistance, UFR)¹⁶.

Like his father, M. Déby was initially completely loyal to the Élysée Palace. The November 2024 maneuver, however, seemed to catch the French completely by surprise. So, what happened in the relationship between Chad and the Fifth Republic?

The situation was becoming increasingly complex, with the reasons for the growing mutual mistrust being highly intricate. In early 2024, Jean-Marie Bockel, the French President's special envoy for Africa, visited Chad and proposed that his Chadian counterparts discuss the reduction of French military presence in Africa in general, particularly in Chad. This visit was of considerable significance. In assessing the dynamics of the Fifth Republic's relations, the French diplomat unequivocally stated, perhaps for the first time, that denying the end of "French Africa" would be "blindness"¹⁷.

One might have thought that Paris was voluntarily scaling back its military cooperation with Chad. However, this was not the case. Firstly, France no longer has the forces and resources to effectively control its former colonies. Therefore, the (initially) partial withdrawal of troops from Chad was in line with the overall trend of a substantial reduction in the Fifth Republic's military presence on the African continent. However, there were also very specific, subjective reasons for the sharp cooling of relations between the two countries.

RELATIONS BETWEEN PARIS AND N'DJAMENA DURING THE REIGN OF M. DEBY

The relationship between Chad and France has been marked by a gradual deterioration from the moment the "hereditary president" came to power. Some experts suggested that M. Déby distrusted the French military because they failed to intervene in the very battles with the rebels in which his father died [Pikhtov 2024]. However, this motive is unlikely to have been decisive in the deterioration of relations between N'Djamena and Paris. Déby the son, like his father, is not particularly sentimental and was guided by more pragmatic interests in his relations with the former metropolis. The reasons for the cooling appear to be far more prosaic and personal.

Following the death of Idriss Déby, France condemned M. Déby's refusal to hold early elections. E. Macron attempted then to dissuade the younger Déby from running in the presidential election, suggesting that transferring the presidency from father to son would be undemocratic. It was then that the latter conceived of the idea of diversifying Chad's foreign policy. During the transition period (2021–2024), the "interim president" concluded military cooperation agreements with the UAE, Turkey, and Hungary. In January 2024, he made an official visit to Moscow¹⁸.

¹⁶ Tchad: l'armée prend l'avantage sur les rebelles. *Le Figaro*. 10.05.2009. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2009/05/10/01003-20090510ARTFIG00085-tchad-l-armee-prend-l-avantage-sur-les-rebelles-.php> (accessed: 26.07.2025)

¹⁷ Macron's special envoy declared the end of "French Africa." *RIA Novosti*. 13.02.24. (In Russ.). <https://ria.ru/20240213/afrika-1926976274.html> (accessed: 15.11.2025)

¹⁸ Au Tchad, Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno et les costumes de la discorde. *Jeune Afrique*. 03.07.2024. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1584037/politique/au-tchad-mahamat-idriss-deby-itno-et-les-costumes-de-la-discorde/> (accessed: 09.10.2025).

The confrontation intensified after the French National Financial Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into the embezzlement of public funds by the Chadian leader. M. Déby was accused of embezzling financial aid from the Fifth Republic allocated to the Republic of Chad to purchase luxury clothing [Pikhtov 2024]. Such a trifling matter, it would seem! However, the scale of the Chadian president's wardrobe overhaul was astonishing: 900,000 euros were spent on Déby's clothing through a shell company. Of course, in the context of a sovereign country's economy, this is a relatively modest sum. However, this incident has received very strict moral and ethical scrutiny in both Chad and France. It is important to note that Chad is one of the poorest countries in the world¹⁹.

Unsurprisingly, M. Déby himself was offended by the French justice system and held a grudge. The French media predicted that the prosecutors' excessive meticulousness could seriously affect relations between the two countries. And it did: already in August 2024, the President of Chad declined an invitation to attend a ceremony in France commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Allied landings in Provence, despite the fact that units composed of Chadians—the first Africans to join Charles de Gaulle's cause—were also participating in this military operation. This could be seen as a sign of dissatisfaction from N'Djamena [Pikhtov 2024]. Shortly afterwards, at the end of August 2024, it became known that the National Prosecutor's Office was planning to charge M. Déby with the illegal acquisition of real estate in France worth over 30 million euros²⁰. This was a more serious matter than a wardrobe upgrade at public expense.

The Chadian president's reaction was immediate. In early January, E. Macron expressed dissatisfaction with the decision of French-speaking African countries to sever military cooperation with Paris. According to Macron, the Africans made this decision in consultation with Paris, but they didn't announce it publicly and "forgot to say thank you" for the French help in combating terrorism.²¹ This ill-considered statement sparked a storm of indignation in the Sahel countries. Among the critics of the Élysée Palace was M. Déby. On January 7, 2025, he stated, "I would like to express my outrage at the recent statements by President Emmanuel Macron, which exude a contemptuous attitude towards Africa and Africans. Frankly, I think he is in the wrong era." He added, "The decision to end military cooperation with France is entirely Chad's sovereign decision. There is no room for any ambiguity here."²²

This clarification was required after the General Staff of the French Armed Forces attempted to portray the withdrawal of French soldiers as a mutual decision between the two governments. A declaration issued by French strategists stated that France's permanent military presence in the Republic of Chad "no longer meets the expectations and interests of both parties."²³ Earlier, Abderaman Koulamallah, the Chadian Foreign Minister, responded to E. Macron's insinuations by also condemning his dismissive

¹⁹ Mamchits R. Chad: Investment projects against a backdrop of poverty. *Business magazine 'Invest-foresight.'* 24.03.2021. (In Russ.). <https://www.if24.ru/chad-investproekty-na-fone-bednosti/> (accessed: 09.10.2025)

²⁰ L'enquête française qui fait trembler le Tchad. *Mediapart.* 23.08.2024. <https://mediapart.fr/journal/international/230824/l-enquete-francaise-qui-fait-trembler-le-tchad> (accessed: 09.10.2025)

²¹ Princwill N. Macron's claim that Africans failed to say 'thank you' for French military aid sparks outrage. *CNN.* 07.01.2025. <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/01/07/africa/macron-africa-comments-spark-outrage-intl/index.html> (accessed: 09.10.2025)

²² Alwihda: The President of Chad expressed outrage at Macron's attacks on Africa. *TASS.* 07.01.2025. (In Russ.). <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/22833183> (accessed: 09.10.2025)

²³ France announced the end of its permanent military presence in Chad. *RIA Novosti.* 12.11.2024. (In Russ.). <https://ria.ru/20241211/chad-1988614529.html> (accessed: 09.10.2025)

remarks and calling for “respect for Africans and their contribution to the fighting on France's side in two world wars.”²⁴

Finally, the explanation for the expulsion of the French from the shores of Lake Chad, as reported by the news portal *Jeune Afrique*, appears quite plausible. Citing its own source, this media reported that the reason for the termination of the military cooperation agreement between the Republic of Chad and the French Republic was due to “a divergence of positions on the civil conflict in Sudan.”²⁵

WITHDRAWAL OF FRENCH TROOPS FROM THE REPUBLIC OF CHAD

In total, approximately 1,000 French personnel were stationed at three bases in Chad, most of whom were based at the Adji Kossei air base. This largely desert country was a key component of France’s military presence in Africa and its last foothold in the Sahel after the forced withdrawal of French troops from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.

After the Republic of Chad officially terminated its defense cooperation agreement with the French Republic in late November 2024, it wasn’t long before, on December 11, 2024, the General Staff of the French Armed Forces announced the departure of two fighter jets from the territory of the African country, seeking full sovereignty. “A group of French fighter jets, based in Chad for decades, took off <...> from N’Djamena. Two *Mirage 2000Ds*, accompanied by a tanker, took off in the morning,” RIA Novosti reported, citing a source in the French military²⁶.

The withdrawal of the French Air Force air group from Chad marked the start of the final phase of the French military’s presence in the Great Lakes region. Remarkably, the military department of the Fifth Republic attempted to lend this action a semblance of propriety by portraying the decision as having been made on the banks of the Seine: “The withdrawal of the fighter jets is the first step; the crews and mechanics are the first to return to France. This first stage marks the end of our permanent military presence, which no longer meets the expectations and interests of both parties” stated the declaration of the French Air Force General Staff²⁷. President M. Déby, for his part, declared that cooperation agreements with France were “completely obsolete” in light of the “political and geostrategic realities of our time.”²⁸ The geopolitical situation in the Sahara-Sahel region had changed radically, but the political elite of the Fifth Republic was too slow to recognize the new challenges.

“According to French and African experts, France was unprepared for the expansion of Islamists in its former colonies. It was taken by surprise by the increased desire for greater independence from Paris” [Chernega 2018]. The French attempt to present a respectable veneer to their retreat from Chad and portray it as a mutual decision by both parties looked rather pathetic. Under intense pressure from the Chadian government, on

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Chadian authorities, having terminated their military cooperation agreement with France, are demanding that French troops leave the country by January 31. *IA news2 Africa*. 20.12.2024. (In Russ.) <https://www.news2.ru/story/694755/> (accessed: 09.10.2025)

²⁶ French fighter jets left Chad. *RIA Novosti*. 10.12.2024. (In Russ.). <https://ria.ru/20241210/chad-1988421218.html> (accessed: 09.10.2025)

²⁷ France announced the end of its permanent military presence in Chad. *RIA Novosti*. 11.12.2024. (In Russ.). <https://ria.ru/20241211/chad-1988614529.html> (accessed: 11.10.2025)

²⁸ France ends military presence in Sahel region with handover of last base in Chad. *France24*. 30.01.2025. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250130-france-hands-over-last-base-in-chad-amid-withdrawal> (accessed: 09.02.2025)

December 26, the French were forced to urgently abandon their military base in Faya-Largeau in the north of the country. A few days later, on January 11, 2025, the French abandoned their second base in Abéché. During the official handover of the Abéché base to the Chadian armed forces, the authorities of the African country declared that the deadline for the withdrawal of French troops from the country of January 31, 2025, was non-negotiable.

On January 30, 2025, following this ultimatum, the French army handed over its last base in Chad during a military ceremony in the capital, N'Djamena, the general staffs of both countries announced. According to a statement from the Chadian high command, this event marked the end of France's military presence in the African country "in accordance with the wishes of the high authorities" in N'Djamena. France was left to acknowledge its failure. "The Kossei camp was handed over today to the Chadian army," stated Colonel Guillaume Vernet, spokesman for the French General Staff²⁹. Moreover, this event had a broader context. France no longer has a military presence in the Sahel³⁰.

Despite the categorical demands for the withdrawal of troops from Chad, it should be noted that M. Déby's government is very cautious about developing military and political cooperation with the Élysée Palace. Commenting on the final withdrawal of French troops from his country, the Foreign Minister of Chad, Abderaman Koulamalah, stated that, from now on, "there will be no French or Russian soldiers" in the country. He added that this decision "is not directed against France" and that Paris remains an "important partner" for Chad³¹. The head of Chadian diplomacy, Abderaman Koulamalah, emphasized that "this is not something directed against France, but something for the benefit of Chad."³²

However, even the pro-French analysts at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism were forced to admit that the withdrawal of French troops from Chad and the termination of the defense agreement will negatively impact France, which will theoretically no longer have a military presence in the Sahel zone [Dukhan 2024].

CONCLUSION

M. Déby's decision has caused despondency within the political community of the Fifth Republic. Despite the efforts of the Chadian government to mitigate the consequences, the breakdown in relations between Chad and France has become indicative of the disintegration of the entire Françafrique system. As Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Thierry Mariani has asserted, "The severing of ties with Chad and Senegal, who have declared the need for the withdrawal of French troops from their territories, is a disaster for Emmanuel Macron's foreign policy, which has lost all influence in Africa during his seven-year presidency."

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ L'armée française quitte le Tchad et rétrocède sa dernière base militaire au Sahel. *France 24*. 30.01.2025. <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20250130-arm%C3%A9e-fran%C3%A7aise-quitte-tchad-r%C3%A9troc%C3%A8de-derni%C3%A8re-base-militaire-sahel> (accessed: 30.01.2025)

³¹ Chad is not happy with Paris: how Russia and France are vying for military influence in Africa. *RTVI*. 12.12.2024. (In Russ.). <https://rtvi.com/stories/chad-parizhu-ne-rad-kak-rossiya-i-francziya-boryutsya-zavoennoe-vliyanie-v-afrike/> (accessed: 09.02.2025)

³² «Au Tchad, il n'y aura ni militaires français, ni militaires russes», dit son chef de la diplomatie. *France24*. 05.12.2024. <https://www.france24.com/fr/%C3%A9missions/en-t%C3%A0te-%C3%A0-t%C3%A0te/20241205-il-n-y-aura-ni-militaires-fran%C3%A7ais-ni-russes-au-tchad-dot-le-chef-de-la-diplomatie-tchadienne> (accessed: 09.02.2025)

“What happened to [the relationship with] Chad is tragic. It’s 50 years of friendship that ended... It’s a disaster for our foreign policy, and it’s Macron’s fault. He has repeatedly shown his contempt for African leaders—the same contempt he shows for the French. When he publicly lectures African leaders during his visits, that’s the only kind of relationship you can have. Therefore, the long-standing French policy in Africa, developed under de Gaulle, Pompidou, and especially Chirac, is now completely gone,” the politician stated.

“Macron is not engaged in diplomacy but rather in communication. He has become a kind of illusory influencer who travels the world and takes pictures when his country is in chaos and has lost all international credibility... No one in the past 40 years has caused as much damage as he has. If he really wants to do France a favor, he should resign immediately,”³³ concluded the MEP.

The author believes that T. Mariani is overly categorical in his assessment of Emmanuel Macron’s personal contribution to the crisis in Franco-African relations. Macron undoubtedly bears some responsibility for the failure of the Élysée Palace’s African policy. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to exaggerate the role of subjective factors in triggering the profound crisis in France’s relations with African countries. It is important to acknowledge that the beginning of the current millennium witnessed tectonic shifts in the global geopolitical situation. New powerful players emerged on the African continent, with whom the decrepit and impoverished Fifth Republic could no longer compete. Having lost military and political influence in the Francophone countries in the Sahel, Central Africa, and Tropical Africa, France was forced to permit access to the African raw materials and other resources to those who were willing to trade with African partners at market prices, without benefits or preferences, unlike French companies.

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the radical transformation in the mindset of the political class in African states that has occurred over the decades of decolonization of the African continent. The populations of these countries have made significant progress in developing a general and political culture, and the formation of civil society has become a significant factor in the development of local societies. It is unlikely that France will regain any of its influence in Sub-Saharan Africa, which it has almost completely lost. The French model of neocolonialism has proven to be the most brutal and predatory, and the most hypocritical. The *Françafrique* system has left a bitter memory in the hearts and minds of Africans.

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³³ Mariani called the severing of ties with Chad and Senegal a disaster for France. *RIA Novosti*. 02.12.2024. (In Russ.). <https://ria.ru/20241202/frantsiya-1986787325.html> (accessed: 26.12.2025)

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Научная статья

**ДАЛЕКО, ДАЛЕКО, НА ОЗЕРЕ ЧАД...
ЗАКАТ ВОЕННО-ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОГО СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА
ФРАНЦИИ И РЕСПУБЛИКИ ЧАД**

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Аннотация. Внимание автора статьи сосредоточено на эволюции отношений Франции и Республики Чад в период правления Махамата Идриса Деби Итно. Акцент сделан на военном сотрудничестве Пятой Французской республики с этой африканской страной.

Отмечается, что с момента прихода к власти Идриса Деби, отца ныне действующего президента, он неизменно пользовался покровительством Елисейского дворца. Военно-политическая система взаимодействия Франции с африканскими государствами, получившая название «Франсафрик», все эти годы обеспечивала не только политическое прикрытие авторитарного режима клана Деби, но в периоды острых политических кризисов оказывала ему военную и экономическую помощь. Приход к власти сына убитого в бою с повстанцами президента привел к быстрому охлаждению отношений Парижа и Нджамены. Рассматриваются объективные и субъективные причины кризиса во взаимодействии двух стран и причины резкого охлаждения отношений между двумя государствами. К числу объективных факторов отнесены глубокие геополитические трансформации в Африке, появление на континенте новых игроков, прежде всего Китая, а также возвращение на континент Российской Федерации. Показано, что за время президентского правления Э. Макрона Франция утратила полностью или частично свое влияние в Центральноафриканской Республике, Мали, Буркина-Фасо, Нигере и Габоне, социально-политические катаклизмы, деформировавшие отношения с бывшей метрополией, произошли в Гвинее и Кот-д'Ивуаре. К числу субъективных факторов, обусловивших конфликт между Чадом и Францией, отнесены привлечение к судебной ответственности М. Деби за ряд финансовых злоупотреблений и межличностный конфликт между президентами Пятой республики и Республики Чад. Обоснована точка зрения, согласно которой отказ от военного сотрудничества Республики Чад и Сенегала с Францией, а также ликвидация военной базы Франции в Кот-д'Ивуар фактически ознаменовали завершение распада неокOLONиальной системы «Франсафрик».

Ключевые слова: Республика Чад, Франция, «Франсафрик», военные базы, вывод французских войск, М. Деби, Э. Макрон

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POLITICAL SCIENCE

Research article

THE RSA'S OPPOSITION PARTIES' APPROACHES TO SOLVING THE ENERGY CRISIS: A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO THE ANC?

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Abstract. The energy crisis in South Africa became a byword within the South African society, having transformed into a critical factor in the political infighting. The shortage of generating capacity, the lack of qualified personnel, the widespread corruption and other challenges have significantly undermined the energy sector. It has contributed to the mood of protest in the population. These protest sentiments among the public resulted in their voting for opposition parties promising to find a way out of the energy crisis by a range of the South African citizens. The paper considers the ideas of the most popular South African opposition parties in the context of the resolution of the long-standing energy crisis. One of the main materials for analysing the parties' approaches to resolving the energy crisis was their 2024 manifestos. Since it was the parties' pre-election views on the energy crisis that were examined, all of them are called in this text as "opposition" regardless of whether they joined the Government of National Unity/GNU after the elections.

The views of the South African opposition parties, including those, which entered into the Government of National Unity (GNU) following the 2024 elections, on the pathways out of the energy crisis are often utopian and radical. Thus, they can potentially lead to unpredictable consequences. In particular, the privatisation of the energy sector advocated by some parties poses the risk of the nuclear power plant, controlled by the state-owned company Eskom, being transferred to private companies. It, in turn, implicates the loss of the state control over a highly sensitive economic sector that requires significant, unprofitable investments in the safe storage and disposal of radioactive wastes. The opposition's emphasis on renewable energy sources is detrimental due to its underestimation of the domestic fossil fuels' use; it is fraught with overexpenditure, inefficient redistribution, as well as lack of attention to the detrimental effect of certain types of green energy on both the environment and human health.

Keywords: energy crisis, South Africa, green agenda, coal-fired power generation, nuclear energy, political parties, opposition

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Despite being one of the most advanced nations in relation to both industrial and energy development on the whole African continent, South Africa faces a major challenge: the growth in electricity generation lags behind the rate of consumption, resulting in numerous negative outcomes. These include underemployment and unemployment, low educational attainment, persistent poverty, and diminished quality of life in rural and traditionally disadvantaged areas. A particular issue to be underlined is the impact of the energy crisis on the healthcare sector, including postponed or canceled surgeries, sharply increased expenses on maintaining lung ventilators, and power outages in refrigeration units storing medicines and vaccines [Lamidi, Juta 2024].

Inefficient management of the state-owned electricity utility Eskom ended in substantial debt to creditors, having limited opportunities for infrastructure modernization (for an in-depth analysis of the Eskom's problems, see [Skubko 2023]). It has led to the slow rates of investment, undermining the company's position [Müller 2023: 4]. Contributing factors include frequent changes in leadership coupled with permutation of personnel, managerial incompetence [Hendrickse 2022: 291], misappropriation of funds, insufficient generating capacity, operational failures, pending technical maintenance issues with respect to the power grids, and a shortage of adequately trained staff owing to their retirement or switching to other industries [Davidson, Filatova 2009: 423].

The huge problem, which is the clients' refusal to pay for substandard electricity supply services, commonly referred to as the "culture of non-payment," is widespread in South Africa [Shubin 2020: 59]. From the point of view of several political parties, the privatization of the energy sector would address the issue of non-paying customers and indebted municipalities. Currently, the Eskom is legally prohibited from cutting electricity to municipalities, since such actions would also adversely affect responsible payers residing in those areas.

THE ENERGY CRUNCH IN SOUTH AFRICA: THE ANC'S PERSPECTIVE

The African National Congress (ANC) party, while in power since 1994, has consistently placed emphasis on the energy sector development, having converted the universal access to electricity into one of its principal objectives. Therefore, the share of the electrified households soared from nearly 40% in 1993 to approximately 70% in 2003 [Eberhard 2005: 5309]. Lately, facing the challenges connected to the energy crisis, the party has sought to balance the expansion of the renewable energy sources with the need for a stable electricity supply, pushing forward the use of the fossil fuels as well as renewables. For instance, the ANC supports projects in gas, nuclear, and hydroelectric power, endorses the retention of coal capacity in the foreseeable future, and shows interest in wind and solar power. To add to this, in recent years, the attention has focused

on the implementation of the Battery Energy Storage Independent Power Producer Procurement Program (BESIPPPP) to accumulate and store energy via the batteries' network expansion for the grid stability, particularly during peak workload periods¹. According to the ANC, this approach will help overcome the limitations of solar plants and wind installations, which generate electricity only under sufficient sunlight and wind conditions.

For the ANC, providing energy supply to households, in particular, low-income ones and workers' families, remains one of the priorities. In 2009, the South African government announced a launch of the Solar Water Heating Program (SWHP) to furnish both households and commercial buildings with solar water heaters. The program aimed to install 1 million heaters² by 2014 and 4 million by 2030, providing 100 liters of hot water per day to low-income households. The initiative sought to reduce electricity costs by 30–50% and curb carbon emissions [Netshiozwi 2019], while creating jobs through installation and maintenance of the above-mentioned water-heaters [Wlokas 2011]. As of March 2025, of the 87,000 purchased solar water heaters, only 59,000 were installed by the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE)³, culminating in substantial overspending (over 324 million rands) merely for storage of the unused equipment⁴. In such a way, planning, implementation, and monitoring issues of the program are left unsolved.

The ANC also considers the investment in the expansion of the transmission network to be an essential point. In 2024, for this purpose, a 440 billion rands⁵ transmission expansion project was devised, arousing interest from international companies, inter alia, from India and China⁶. According to the Eskom's updated Transmission Development Plan, the most recent updated version of which was adopted in December 2024, over 14,000 kilometers of new transmission lines are expected to be put into operation by 2033 to ensure the country's energy security.

The ANC believes that South Africa's transition to a low-carbon economy should be carried out with due regard for the interests of society and workers employed in the

¹ See: Minister Kgosientsho Ramokgopa on Battery Energy Storage Independent Power Procurement Programme. *South African Government*. 30.05.2025. <https://gov.za/news/media-statements/minister-kgosientsho-ramokgopa-battery-energy-storage-independent-power> (accessed: 24.11.2025); Augustine C. Tapping into new ways of storing energy. *Government communications*. <https://gcis.gov.za/Tapping-into-new-ways-of-storing-energy> (accessed: 24.11.2025)

² Mineral Resources and Energy Budget: Committee Report; Update on Solar Water Heater programme. *Parliamentary monitor*. 02.06.2020. <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/30362/#:~:text=The%20Committee%20received%20a%20progress> (accessed: 22.11.2025)

³ Formed in June 2019 as a result of the merger of the Department of Energy and the Department of Mineral Resources.

⁴ Media Statement: Committee Expresses Concerns Over Failures and Wasteful Expenditure in Solar Water Heater Programme. *Parliament*. <https://parliament.gov.za/press-releases/media-statement-committee-expresses-concerns-over-failures-and-wasteful-expenditure-solar-water-heater-programme#:~:text=The%20Chairperson%20of%20the%20committee> (accessed: 23.10.2025)

⁵ National Treasury on Independent Transmission Programme. *South African Government*. 06.06.2025. <https://gov.za/news/media-statements/national-treasury-independent-transmission-programme-06-jun-2025> (accessed: 23.10.2025)

⁶ Burkhardt B. South Africa's R440bn grid build draws Adani, Chinese firms. *MoneyWeb*. 23.10.2025. <https://moneyweb.co.za/news/south-africa/south-africas-r440bn-grid-build-draws-adani-chinese-firms/> (accessed: 23.11.2025)

energy sector. Therefore, the ruling party supports the transition to a carbon-neutral economy at a pace consistent with development goals, while paying particular attention to the ensurance of the reliable energy supply to the population at an affordable price. This, in its turn, defines the ANC's stance as balanced and well-thought-out⁷.

As part of the transition to a low-carbon economy, the South African government is placing particular focus on the Mpumalanga province, where the majority of coal utilized in heavy industry, petrochemical, and other sectors is extracted, and where the majority of electricity is produced (the largest number of coal-fired power plants are located here) [Shikwambanaa et al. 2020]. The ANC leadership acknowledges that shifting to "green energy" will have a negative influence on a lot of people in this province, who are employed in the coal industry [Nel, Marais 2025: 249, 253].

WAYS TO SOLVE THE ENERGY CRISIS: APPROACHES OF POLITICAL PARTIES

The acute issue of the insufficient electricity generation and, consequently, rolling blackouts is viewed by the opposition parties as a tool for political pressure on the government [Chernenko 2020: 53]. Virtually every opposition party is prepared to propose its own ways of resolving this burning question. Apparently, the "high-voltage tension" between the South African government and opposition forces regarding the prolonged energy crisis reaches its peak during the pre-election period.

In the seventh general elections held in South Africa on May 29, 2024, the ANC for the first time faced a real threat of losing its parliamentary majority, having secured only 40.18% of the votes. Hence, the ANC reached a strategic decision to establish a Government of National Unity (GNU), comprised of: the Democratic Alliance (21.8% of the vote), the Inkatha Freedom Party (3.85%), the Freedom Front Plus (1.36%), the Patriotic Alliance (2.05%), the GOOD Party (0.18%), the United Democratic Movement (0.49%), and the Rise Mzansi (0.42%). Other parties discussed in this article, such as the uMkhonto weSizwe Party (14.59%), the Economic Freedom Fighters (9.52%), the Action South Africa (1.19%), the Build One South Africa (0.41%), and the African Christian Democratic Party (0.60% of the vote), remained in opposition⁸.

⁷ See: ANC Elections Manifesto 2024. Pp. 24–25. <https://anc1912.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/ANC-2024-Elections-Manifesto.pdf> (accessed: 17.11.2025); Electricity and Energy Budget Vote 10 Debate by Hon. Fasiha Hassan, MP – ANC Parliament. 10.07.2025. <https://ancparliament.org.za/electricity-energy-budget-vote-10-debate-by-hon-fasiha-hassan-mp-african-national-congress/> (accessed: 17.11.2025); Nel L. Bread and energy: What South African political parties have to say. *Natural Justice*. 23.05.2023. <https://naturaljustice.org/bread-and-energy-what-south-african-political-parties-have-to-say/> (accessed: 17.11.2025); Energy manifestos: Comparing what ANC, EFF, DA have in mind to end load shedding. *IOL*. 28.02.2024. <https://iol.co.za/business-report/economy/2024-02-28-energy-manifestos-comparing-what-anc-eff-da-have-in-mind-to-end-load-shedding/> (accessed: 17.11.2025); Political parties share their views on renewable energy. *Techcentral*. 24.04.2024. <https://techcentral.co.za/political-parties-views-renewable-energy/243650/> (accessed: 17.11.2025)

⁸ Election Results and Allocation of Seats in Parliament (National Assembly) and Provincial Legislatures: 2024. *Parliamentary monitoring group*. 02.06.2024. <https://pmg.org.za/blog/Election%20Results%20and%20Allocation%20of%20Seats%20in%20Parliament%20National%20Assembly%20and%20Provincial%20Legislatures%202024> (accessed: 17.11.2025)

One of the main reasons for the decline in electoral support for the ANC was both the rolling blackouts themselves and the party's inability to properly regulate the performance of the state-owned energy company, i.e., the Eskom [Skubko 2023]. Although some changes did occur during the pre- and post-election period, they came down to the mitigation of the consequences rather than to the provision of a comprehensive solution to the energy crisis and the removal of its root causes (see *Table 1*). The largest opposition parties dedicated up to 10% of their 2024 manifestos to this very problem.

Table 1. Opposition parties' views on the key factors in addressing the energy crisis

Party	Position on:			
	Non-renewable energy (particularly, coal)	Renewables	Nuclear energy	The role of the private business in the economy
Democratic Alliance (DA)	+	+++	+	+++
uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MKP)	+++	+	+++	-
Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)	+++	++	+++	+
Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)	++	++	++	++
Freedom Front Plus (FF+)	+	+++	+	+++
Rise Mzansi (RM)	+	+++	+	++
Action South Africa (ASA)	+	+++	+	+++
GOOD Party (GOOD)	-	+++	-	++
Patriotic Alliance (PA)	++	+++	++	++
Build One South Africa (BOSA)	++	++	++	+++
United Democratic Movement (UDM)	++	+	++	++
African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP)	+++	++	+	++

Source: Compiled by the author.

Note:

" + " indicates weak positive attitude;

" ++ " indicates a moderate/compromise position;

" +++ " indicates an actively promoted position;

" - " indicates a negative attitude.

The liberal **Democratic Alliance (DA)**, led by John Steenhuisen, views the rolling blackouts as the only tangible obstacle to the sustainable development and investment attraction⁹, as well as the gravest threat to both economic and social stability in the state.

As outlined in the party's 2024 manifesto, the DA proposed the division and restructuring of the Eskom and the establishment of an open electricity market to foster competition among producers. This position aligns with the party's ideology, which asserts that a free-market system is more efficient than a state monopoly. The DA believes that the key solution to South Africa's energy crisis lies in transferring the energy system to the control of an independent organization¹⁰ and increasing electricity generation outside of the Eskom. A large number of private suppliers would encourage competition, thereby improving service quality, expanding supply, and reducing electricity prices.

One of the DA's overriding priorities is the development of the network infrastructure, in that the South African transmission grid, which meets modern standards, is concentrated around coal-fired power plants in the Mpumalanga province. The DA also intends to concentrate on achieving zero carbon emissions through the diversification of the energy mix and the putting of new energy sources into service.

While coal usage is not planned to be phased out in the short term, the DA appears to over-rely on solar panels among renewable energy sources. Indeed, of all the renewable energy sources generating up to 17% of the country's electricity¹¹, solar panels account for 8%¹². The party claims that in the long term, solar panels may become the cheapest electricity source, for the price of solar power engineering in 2024 fell below 1 rand per kWh, while the Eskom's average internal tariff increased to 1.92 rand per kWh¹³. Consequently, the DA deems protectionist policies regarding high tariffs on the import of technologies like photovoltaic panels and batteries¹⁴ inappropriate.

The left-populist uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MKP) vehemently condemns plans to privatize the key state assets, in particular, the Eskom, and strongly opposes its division¹⁵, arguing that such steps would deny millions of South Africans access to essential services and cause the state to lose its ability to determine the country's vector of development. The MKP calls for a people-centered economic program aimed at restoring the state's potential, not least by ensuring energy independence via

⁹ Oosthuizen J. DA hou eie alternatiewe staatsrede. *Voertaal*. 08.02.2023. <https://voertaal.nu/da-hou-eie-alternatiewe-staatsrede/> (accessed: 25.05.2025)

¹⁰ Oosthuizen J. Eskom is in totale verval, sê opposisie. *Voertaal*. 11.11.2021. <https://voertaal.nu/eskom-is-in-totale-verval-se-opposisie/> (accessed: 27.07.2025)

¹¹ 17% of South Africa's electricity was generated from low-carbon sources in 2024, less than half the global average of 41%. *Ember*. 10.04.2025. <https://ember-energy.org/countries-and-regions/south-africa/> (accessed: 21.06.2025)

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Power to the people, now! *DA*. <https://da.org.za/powertothepeople> (accessed: 24.07.2025)

¹⁴ Ajala S. The implication of South Africa's 2024 election on its energy transition plan. *Energy Transition. The Global Energiewende*. 05.06.2024. <https://energytransition.org/2024/06/the-implication-of-south-africas-2024-election-on-its-energy-transition-plan/> (accessed: 17.07.2025)

¹⁵ The People's Mandate. MK Manifesto. *MK*. 2024. P. 11. <https://mkparty.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/MK-Manifesto-The-Peoples-Mandate-Paths-Final-2.pdf> (accessed: 25.09.2025)

investments in coal and nuclear energy, while simultaneously rejecting the services of independent energy producers¹⁶.

The MKP is the only party opposed to the transition to low-carbon energy. In its efforts to modernize the coal-based infrastructure and accelerate nuclear energy development¹⁷, the party discourages what it calls the “unjust transition” from coal¹⁸, underlining that the South African energy system is designed to use coal, not renewables, which require a decentralized network capable of processing energy from multiple sources.

According to the party, the ongoing rolling blackouts, which have already demonstrated the complete failure of the Government of National Unity, will further exacerbate the investment problem, paralyze business to an even greater degree, destroy jobs, and deepen poverty. The MKP argues that power outages are a deliberately provoked crisis aimed at weakening and ultimately ruining the Eskom. The party declares that the ultimate goal is to sell the Eskom at a bargain price to the white monopolistic capital.

The left-populist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) identifies nuclear energy as a trusted energy resource¹⁹. In their 2024 manifesto, the EFF stated its intention to establish international cooperation with strategic partners, particularly the Russian Federation, to build a nuclear power plant²⁰. The party plans for the plant to produce between 3,000 and 6,000 MW of electricity under a 20-year “build–operate–transfer” contract²¹.

If victorious in the elections, the EFF has committed to decarbonizing the electricity sector at a pace, scale, and cost that is feasible and beneficial for South Africa²². It prioritizes supporting communities and workers affected by the transition to a low-carbon economy²³. However, before focusing on promoting the green economy model, the party acknowledged the need for expanded industrialization and the creation of new jobs²⁴. For example, concerning the issue of repairing and restoring the coal-fired power plants, the EFF expressed its intent to enhance international cooperation, notably with China²⁵. The

¹⁶ Ntanzu H. MK Party warns of deeper economic crisis amid VAT suspension. *IOL*. 29.04.2025. <https://iol.co.za/news/politics/2025-04-29-mk-party-warns-of-deeper-economic-crisis-amid-vat-suspension/> (accessed: 21.05.2025)

¹⁷ The People’s Mandate. MK Manifesto. *MK*. 2024. P. 11. <https://mkparty.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/MK-Manifesto-The-Peoples-Mandate-Paths-Final-2.pdf> (accessed: 25.09.2025)

¹⁸ Nel L. Bread and energy: What South African political parties have to say. *Natural Justice*. 23.05.2023. <https://naturaljustice.org/bread-and-energy-what-south-african-political-parties-have-to-say/> (accessed: 20.07.2025)

¹⁹ Our Land & Jobs Now. Stop Loadshedding! 2024 Election Manifesto. *EFFonline*. 2024. P. 46. <https://effonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/A5-EFF-2024-Manifesto-full-version.pdf> (accessed: 12.08.2025)

²⁰ *Ibid.* P. 47.

²¹ *Ibid.* P. 48.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Nel L. Bread and energy: What South African political parties have to say. *Natural Justice*. 23.05.2023. <https://naturaljustice.org/bread-and-energy-what-south-african-political-parties-have-to-say/> (accessed: 20.07.2025)

²⁴ The Political Party Manifesto Debate and The Manifesto Assessment. *Project 90 by 2030*. 13.05.2024. P. 3. <https://90by2030.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Political-Parties-Manifestos-Assessment-2024.pdf> (accessed: 29.07.2025)

²⁵ *Ibid.*

party also included in its manifesto the point regarding the deployment of the “clean coal” technologies, including carbon capture and storage²⁶.

The manifesto provides for the abolition of preferential electricity tariffs for corporations in order to reduce their electricity demand. In contrast to its main opponent among the opposition parties, i.e., the MKP, the EFF proposes subsidizing the supply of the alternative energy sources to public institutions (hospitals, schools, police stations) as well as to residential buildings during construction²⁷. The party intends to eradicate all illegal grid connections but promises the low-income households up to 200 kWh of free electricity.

The position of the **Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)**, whose main support base is the KwaZulu-Natal province [Hejn 2009: 107], can generally be described as relatively measured. The IFP proposes to abandon the monopoly in the energy sector, allowing other market participants to demonstrate their potential, while concurrently retaining the sensitive nuclear energy sector exclusively under state control.

The party supports the use of hydro, wind, and solar energy. For instance, the IFP calls for the construction of houses with pre-installed solar panels provided free of charge to residents²⁸ as well as for their installation in low-income households²⁹. It also proposes subsidizing electricity prices for small businesses, communities historically subjected to various forms of discrimination over extended periods, and low-income households³⁰.

Most notable in the IFP manifesto is its positioning as a staunch defender of nuclear energy. The party emphasizes that nuclear energy must firmly remain under state ownership³¹. At the same time, the IFP considers that an ideal solution for managing the Eskom could involve a public–private partnership³². The party appeals for the division of the utility into three separate sectors to ensure operational efficiency and foster competition. The IFP upholds the participation of independent power producers in the overall energy mix to enhance energy security.

Nevertheless, in its 2024 pre-election manifesto, the IFP pays tribute to South Africa’s mining industry, recognizing the value of the coal-fired power plants for the country’s energy sector. Furthermore, the party sees the potential of coal in the production of a wide range of chemical products³³.

²⁶ Winkler H. South Africa’s electricity crisis: what political parties say in their election manifestos about solving it. *Conversation*. 27.03.2024. <https://theconversation.com/south-africas-electricity-crisis-what-political-parties-say-in-their-election-manifestos-about-solving-it-226518> (accessed: 30.07.2025)

²⁷ *Ibid.* P. 44.

²⁸ 13-point Manifesto Plan for the 2024 National and Provincial Elections. *Inkatha Freedom Party*. 2024. P. 14. <https://ifp.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Inkatha-Freedom-Party-2024-Manifesto.pdf> (accessed: 04.07.2025)

²⁹ Nel L. Bread and energy: What South African political parties have to say. *Natural Justice*. 23.05.2023. <https://naturaljustice.org/bread-and-energy-what-south-african-political-parties-have-to-say/> (accessed: 20.07.2025)

³⁰ 13-point Manifesto Plan for the 2024 National and Provincial Elections. *Inkatha Freedom Party*. 2024. P. 14. <https://ifp.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Inkatha-Freedom-Party-2024-Manifesto.pdf> (accessed: 04.07.2025)

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ The Political Party Manifesto Debate and The Manifesto Assessment. *Project 90 by 2030*. 13.05.2024. <https://90by2030.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Political-Parties-Manifestos-Assessment-2024.pdf> (accessed: 29.07.2025)

The right-wing **Freedom Front Plus/FF+ (Vryheidsfront Plus/VF+)**, which declares the protection of the linguistic (particularly, the Afrikaans language) and cultural interests of ethnic minorities, especially the Afrikaners, as its primary political goal, does not speak out for an immediate energy transition in spite of presenting itself as an ardent promoter of the “green technologies” in energy supply. The shift from coal-fired power plants should only be put into action once there is a sufficient portfolio of renewable energy sources to ensure the collection, storage, and distribution of “green energy.”

At the same time, the FF+ maintains that the country would be much safer without nuclear power plants. The party insists that a state-owned company, which has proven unable to properly operate technologically relatively simple coal plants, cannot be entrusted with far more complex nuclear facilities. The FF+ is highly concerned about brain drain from the country’s only nuclear power plant, Koeberg³⁴, as well as the staffing problem arising from the replacement of the knowledgeable engineers and operators with personnel lacking experience in nuclear technology.

It is worth noting that the party’s concerns are not entirely without foundation. Over the past 20 years, several serious incidents occurred at Koeberg: in 2005, an unsecured bolt in the generator of Unit 1 required a shutdown and repair³⁵; in 2010, several fires occurred, and 91 workers were contaminated with the radioactive isotope cobalt-58³⁶; in 2021, air contamination by iodine-131 was detected³⁷; and in 2022, a worker closed the safety valve on Unit 1 instead of Unit 2³⁸. Nevertheless, the party allows for the potential inclusion of small modular reactors (SMRs) in the national energy mix³⁹.

The 2024 pre-election manifesto states that, if the FF+ were to assume power, South Africa would take a leading position in the use of renewable energy, as reflected in the manifesto’s call to reject products, methods, and energy sources harmful to the environment⁴⁰. According to public statements by former FF+ leader Pieter Johannes Groenewald, cooperation with domestic and international partners to achieve a rapid

³⁴ Boshoff W. Koeberg-voerval bevestig alles wat die VF Plus oor kernkrag in Suid-Afrika sê. *Vryheidsfront Plus*. 17.03.2022. <https://vfplus.org.za/latest-news/koeberg-voerval-bevestig-alles-wat-die-vf-plus-oor-kernkrag-in-suid-afrika-s/> (accessed: 29.07.2025)

³⁵ Creamer T. Koeberg marks 30 years of operations as SA mulls new nuclear chapter. *Polity*. 04.04.2014. <https://polity.org.za/article/koeberg-marks-30-years-of-operations-as-sa-mulls-new-nuclear-chapter-2014-04-04> (accessed: 26.07.2025)

³⁶ LTO Koeberg Nuclear Power Station. Oral presentation. *National Nuclear Regulator*. 03.02.2024. P. 1, 2. https://nnr.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/WRITTEN-SUBMISSION-NNR-PUBLIC-HEARINGS-3-FEB-24_CONCERNED-CITIZEN.pdf (accessed: 25.07.2025)

³⁷ Airborne contamination incident at Koeberg Power Station. *Eskom*. 2021. <https://koebergalert.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/cas-airborne-event-r1.png> (accessed: 23.07.2025)

³⁸ LTO Koeberg Nuclear Power Station. Oral presentation. *National Nuclear Regulator*. 03.02.2024. P. 1, 2. https://nnr.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/WRITTEN-SUBMISSION-NNR-PUBLIC-HEARINGS-3-FEB-24_CONCERNED-CITIZEN.pdf (accessed: 25.07.2025)

³⁹ Boshoff W. Energievoorsiening: inploffing van die staat skep geleentheid. *Vryheidsfront Plus*. 15.12.2022. <https://vfplus.org.za/af/mediaverklarings/energievoorsiening-inploffing-van-die-staat-skep-geleentheid/> (accessed: 28.07.2025)

⁴⁰ Parker D. Multi-Party Charter reveals its plans to end loadshedding if ANC can be ousted. *Creamer Media. Engineering Plus*. 28.02.2024. <https://engineeringnews.co.za/article/multi-party-charter-reveals-its-plans-to-end-loadshedding-if-anc-can-be-ousted-2024-02-28> (accessed: 05.11.2025)

energy transition from coal to cleaner and more diversified energy sources is an urgent priority⁴¹.

The **Rise Mzansi (RM)** party, which declares a social-democratic ideology but demonstrates neoliberal tendencies, supports the decentralization of the energy sector, advocating a move away from coal dependence, which is expected to benefit communities neighboring coal enterprises. Regarding low-income groups, the RM considers it necessary to support them in creating their own energy cooperatives, enabling them to become both producers and consumers of electricity⁴². Like the FF+, the party does not rule out the use of small modular reactors and also supports the incorporation of green hydrogen technology into the national energy profile. The RM places particular emphasis on solar energy, planning to equip every building with photovoltaic systems and solar water heaters.

The RM's manifesto is unique in explicitly acknowledging the possibility of “restorative justice”, that is, correcting the errors of the past by addressing climate change—since the party views climate and social justice as inextricably linked, with one being inconceivable without the other⁴³.

The right-centrist **Action South Africa (ActionSA)** party's pre-election plan for addressing the energy crisis, comprising nine points, included, among other things, such measures as:

- Ensuring the Eskom is staffed with highly skilled personnel based on meritocracy principles, as well as retraining workers from the non-renewable energy sector to redirect them into “green energy” industries⁴⁴;

- Decentralizing the energy market. The party considers the decentralized microgrids for the future of energy, particularly for rural areas, aligning its position with that of the FF+ and the RM. In common with the RM, it stands up for the accessibility of rooftop solar panels and solar-powered geysers for low-income households, particularly via tax incentives. The ActionSA seeks to encourage municipalities to reduce dependency on Eskom through the use of microgrids powered by renewable energy⁴⁵.

The ActionSA believes that economic growth, linked to the absence of any problems within the energy sphere, can be achieved through foreign investment. While some logic can be traced in this position, the insights into the state energy sovereignty of the small social-democratic party, the Western Cape-based **GOOD Party (GOOD)**, which seeks to

⁴¹ Boshoff W. Energievoorsiening: inploffing van die staat skep geleentheid. *Vryheidsfront Plus*. 15.12.2022. <https://vfplus.org.za/af/mediaverklarings/energievoorsiening-inploffing-van-die-staat-skep-geleentheid/> (accessed: 28.07.2025)

⁴² Nel L. Bread and energy: What South African political parties have to say. *Natural Justice*. 23.05.2023. <https://naturaljustice.org/bread-and-energy-what-south-african-political-parties-have-to-say/> (accessed: 20.07.2025)

⁴³ The People's Manifesto Booklet – 20 January 2024. P. 53. https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/6512abc58b1468c2e0784360/65ab627c5faa95ea313ab276_RISE%20Mzansi%20Manifesto%20%2B%20.pdf (accessed: 20.07.2025)

⁴⁴ Nel L. Bread and energy: What South African political parties have to say. *Natural Justice*. 23.05.2023. <https://naturaljustice.org/bread-and-energy-what-south-african-political-parties-have-to-say/> (accessed: 20.07.2025)

⁴⁵ Mashaba H. ActionSA's Nine-Point Plan to End Load Shedding. *ActionSA*. 06.03.2024. <https://actionsa.org.za/actionsa-submits-objections-to-irp-2023-provides-nine-point-plan-to-end-load-shedding/> (accessed: 21.08.2025)

“capture” DA votes in this province [Turyanitsa 2020: 70, 71] and permanently stresses environmental justice, overstep the boundaries of the rational. For instance, it is convinced that developed countries should bear the costs for South Africa’s energy transition⁴⁶. While supporting a rapid shift to the renewables, the GOOD simultaneously opposes constructing new or extending the lifespan of existing coal plants, yet promoting a gradual departure from coal, considering non-renewable fuels necessary in the short- and medium-term alongside the renewables. In addition to CO₂ emissions, the GOOD plans to account for methane, which has 34 times the environmental impact of carbon dioxide⁴⁷.

The right-wing **Patriotic Alliance** (PA) takes a hard line against non-payment and illegal connections by citizens. The 2024 pre-election manifesto does not reflect any intention to support vulnerable populations such as the unemployed or low-income groups⁴⁸.

The PA believes that the country must build safe, modern nuclear reactors to ensure base-load power. Rapid adoption of the “green resources” is a top priority, to be pursued according to principles of a wartime economy aimed at achieving the state’s objectives as quickly as possible⁴⁹.

The centrist **Build One South Africa** (BOSA) plans to open the market to multiple energy companies, allowing consumers to choose among them and purchase electricity at affordable prices. According to the BOSA, all energy market participants must ensure that their activities and infrastructure comply with safety standards. The BOSA intends to provide market participants with the ability to freely raise capital for the modernization of South Africa’s energy infrastructure on account of the environmentally sustainable technologies, motivated by tax incentives, which ought to boost R&D investment, that, according to the party, are to enhance human capital and attract valuable specialists to the country⁵⁰.

The left-centrist social-democratic **United Democratic Movement** (UDM) asserts that since 2008, no successful plan has been developed to lift South Africa out of its “energy quagmire.” The party points out that the coal-fired power plants, namely, the Medupi and the Kusile, envisioned as mega-projects intended to transform the South African energy landscape, have far from fully justified high hopes⁵¹.

The United Democratic Movement (UDM) does not support granting the Eskom a monopoly on the generation, distribution, and supply of electricity. The party proposes a

⁴⁶ Nel L. Bread and energy: What South African political parties have to say. *Natural Justice*. 23.05.2023. <https://naturaljustice.org/bread-and-energy-what-south-african-political-parties-have-to-say/> (accessed: 20.07.2025)

⁴⁷ How can GOOD fix climate change? *Forgood*. P. 4. <https://forgood.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Climate.pdf> (accessed: 21.05.2025).

⁴⁸ Patriotic Alliance. Turnaround strategy 2024. *Centre for Early Childhood Development*. P. 21. <https://cecd.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/patriotic-alliance-turnaround-strategy-2024.pdf> (accessed: 31.03.2025)

⁴⁹ Political parties share their views on renewable energy. *Techcentral*. 26.04.2024. <https://techcentral.co.za/political-parties-views-renewable-energy/243650/> (accessed: 13.05.2025)

⁵⁰ BOSA’s Jobs Plan. A blueprint to building a South Africa that works. P. 23–24. https://static.pmg.org.za/BOSA_JOB_PLAN.pdf (accessed: 18.02.2025)

⁵¹ “Corruption destroys our Freedom.” United Democratic Movement Manifesto. 2024. P. 9. <https://static.pmg.org.za/2024-Election-Manifesto.pdf> (accessed: 16.02.2025)

public-private partnership model for the privatization of the holding company, with the state retaining a 51% share.

According to the party, renewable energy sources should occupy a more significant role in South Africa's energy balance. However, in addition to solar, wind, nuclear, and hydro energy, the UDM also includes coal in this category⁵². While there is ongoing fierce debate both in academic and political circles about whether nuclear energy should be classified as "green," coal is universally regarded as a non-renewable energy source.

According to the **African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP)**, a just energy transition in South Africa should include coal in the energy balance (for example, the party welcomed the commissioning of additional power units at the Kusile and Medupi power stations)⁵³. The party believes it would be unjust and equivalent to willfully sabotaging the economy to avoid utilizing the high-quality South African coal reserves, which, if used with clean technologies, could last for 200 years. Against this backdrop, the ACDP aims to stimulate investment in the mining sector⁵⁴.

The ACDP also advocates for the continued growth of renewable energy, particularly wind and solar power. The party believes independent power producers should play a far more significant role in the energy sector than they currently do.

"CLEAN GREEN ENERGY" IN EXCHANGE FOR "DIRTY COAL"?

Despite the overwhelming commitment of most of the above-mentioned parties to expanding the use of renewable energy sources, none of them are currently prepared to completely abandon the use of coal (even if they plan to phase it out eventually).

In South Africa, the majority of electricity generation (estimated between 75% and 86%⁵⁵) is "dirty" [Dirksen 2022], as this portion of the country's energy needs is covered by coal. South Africa ranks 7th in the world in coal production [Williams 2018: 239] and 3rd in the amount of this fossil fuel used for electricity generation [Lamidi, Juta 2024: 512], consuming 40% more coal than the average across African countries [Jahns 2023: 4]. Moreover, the country is forced to burn low-quality coal (mixed with refuse, stones, and scrap metal)⁵⁶, which leads to breakdowns, operational failures, and reduced generating capacity [Van der Westhuizen 2019; Skubko 2023: 38], while high-quality coal is exported abroad. It should be noted that the high-grade coal reserves in South

⁵² The Political Party Manifesto Debate and The Manifesto Assessment. *Project 90 by 2030*. 13.05.2024. P. 4. <https://90by2030.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Political-Parties-Manifestos-Assessment-2024.pdf> (accessed: 29.07.2025)

⁵³ Swart S. SARS Commissioner says energy crisis may have cost the country R150 billion. *ACDP*. 24.10.2023. <https://acdp.org.za/sars-commissioner-says-energy-crisis-may-have-cost-the-country-r150-billion/> (accessed: 24.11.2025)

⁵⁴ Ibid. P. 7.

⁵⁵ See: Xaba N. South Africa's shift from coal to renewables: how it's going. *The Conversation*. 01.05.2025. <https://theconversation.com/south-africas-shift-from-coal-to-renewables-how-its-going-253880> (accessed: 15.11.2025); 17% of South Africa's electricity was generated from low-carbon sources in 2024, less than half the global average of 41%. *Ember*. 10.04.2025. <https://ember-energy.org/countries-and-regions/south-africa/> (accessed: 21.06.2025); Our ongoing coal dependency. Toolkit 3. *Energy Council of South Africa*. <https://energy-council.org.za/mzansi/coal/> (accessed: 15.11.2025)

⁵⁶ Augustine C. Success against coal smugglers. *South African Government*. 02.02.2024. <https://gov.za/blog/success-against-coal-smugglers> (accessed: 23.11.2025)

Africa's Central Highveld Basin are gradually depleting and deteriorating in quality, which presents a severe problem for the coal and energy sectors [De Korte 2015: 569].

The mining and use of coal negatively impact all elements of the environment—land, water, and air—and are notorious for their detrimental effects on human health. Among the most common diseases caused by the intensive burning of coal are tuberculosis and other respiratory ailments, low birth weight, cardiovascular diseases, and eye infections, all of which not only reduce productivity and increase medical costs for individuals but also increase government healthcare expenditures [Phiri, Nyoni 2023].

How realistic are the parties' plans to transition from fossil fuels to decarbonized "green energy"? The integration of some renewable energy sources into the power grid would be beneficial in terms of reducing pollution and decreasing dependence on non-ecological fossil fuels. However, despite the increased interest from the government in renewable energy, as evidenced by the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Program (REIPPPP) launched as early as 2011, it is unlikely that South Africa will achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

Full decarbonization is the ultimate goal of a long process, which South Africa will obviously not complete in the foreseeable future, given the current challenges in integrating renewable energy into the national energy mix due to insufficient investment in infrastructure [Lamidi, Juta 2024: 511]. At present, several roadmaps are focused on addressing the urgent energy crisis. These include the Energy Action Plan (EAP)⁵⁷, Just Energy Transition (JET)⁵⁸ [Patrick et al. 2025], Hydrogen Society Roadmap (HSRM) [Ignatov 2023: 136], and the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP)⁵⁹ [Lamidi, Juta 2024: 511]. However, despite their diversity, the situation regarding the resolution of the energy crisis is still far from being resolved.

Despite the Eskom being widely recognized as a troublesome producer and distributor of electricity, not all South Africans back the controversial ideas articulated by certain political parties regarding the privatization of the company. Influential South African trade unions supported mass protests against the privatization of the state-owned energy company at the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022 [Uys, Holtzhausen 2016: 1179]. Protesters argued that such a step would leave tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of people unemployed, considering that the mining industry is one of the country's largest employers.

Although some parties are inclined to offer alternative employment opportunities to those affected by the transition to renewable energy, fulfilling this intention is challenging in a country with an unemployment rate of 33.2%⁶⁰ (around 60% among

⁵⁷ See: Magaxa K. Minister of Electricity briefing on the Energy Action Plan. *Parliamentary Monitoring Group*. 15.11.2023. <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/37984/> (accessed: 14.09.2025); Energy Action Plan. 18 months Progress Report: March 2024. Republic of South Africa. P. 2. https://gov.za/sites/default/files/progress_on_EAP.pdf.pdf (accessed: 14.09.2025)

⁵⁸ Implementing South Africa's Just Energy Transition. *Just Energy Transition*. <https://justenergytransition.co.za/> (accessed: 14.09.2025).

⁵⁹ Matinde E. South Africa's green hydrogen strategy: Challenges and opportunities. *SAIMM*. 24.07.2025. <https://saimm.co.za/journal-presidents-corner/1271-south-africa-s-green-hydrogen-strategy-challenges-and-opportunities> (accessed: 14.09.2025)

⁶⁰ South Africa Unemployment Rate. *Trading Economics*. <https://tradingeconomics.com/south-africa/unemployment-rate> (accessed: 01.09.2025).

youth, making South Africa one of the countries with the highest youth unemployment rates).

In practice, the “competitive environment” for energy producers, as advocated by several political organizations, which they believe would enhance management efficiency, provide market diversity, and reduce retail electricity prices, is a futile scheme. Private business is driven by the interests of owners, while the government is supposed to make decisions in the interest of society as a whole. If the energy sector were privatized, the government would have to pay for electricity used by state institutions, including public enterprises, healthcare organizations, educational institutions, and other social facilities, at commercial prices.

SOLAR ENERGY AND HYDROGEN: THE PATH TO A BRIGHT FUTURE?

Among all renewable energy sources, solar panels are preferred by the South African opposition parties. It should be noted that from 2022 to 2024, the capacity of consumer solar panels installed on rooftops increased more than fivefold. In 2024, South Africa accounted for 50% of all new photovoltaic installations in Africa, surpassing Egypt (28%)⁶¹ [Jahns 2023]. It is considered that photovoltaic panels will remain the most cost-effective renewable energy technology in South Africa until 2050.

However, relying on solar energy as a reliable “safety cushion” for sustainable development is naïve. The Democratic Alliance (DA) completely supports the European Union’s decision to allocate 4.4 billion euros to South Africa for its “energy transition.” However, it is difficult to believe that solar panels supplied from the EU will be of impeccable quality, as South Africa could be flooded with second-hand panels from China or India.

Moreover, in addition to the direct costs of electricity production, the use of renewable energy sources (including the promoted solar energy) entails associated infrastructure costs. Thus, using supposedly inexpensive panels will lead to significant expenses. Furthermore, the issue of solar panel disposal is an urgent global problem. Without a well-thought-out strategy for recycling photovoltaic modules, they will significantly pollute the environment and detrimentally impact human health due to the toxic heavy metals they contain. Additionally, over time, the previously available prices for panels could rise for various reasons, including South Africa’s possible deviation from the political direction desired by “suppliers.” Therefore, the “sustainable transition” actively promoted by some parties will be extremely costly for the country, not only financially but also in other respects.

Neither the sun nor the wind can be considered 100% stable, reliable sources of energy generation due to their dependence on weather conditions, which sharply limits the reliability of power supply during periods of high demand (especially in winter). At present, hopes are pinned on gaseous fuels such as green hydrogen⁶², which in the future

⁶¹ Rimblas M. A bright future for South Africa’s solar power. *Rated Power*. 15.04.2025. <https://ratedpower.com/blog/South-Africa-solar-power/> (accessed: 12.06.2025)

⁶² Serkerbaeva M. In recent years, there has been a huge leap in the development of green hydrogen energy. *HSE*. 23.10.2023. (In Russ.). <https://economics.hse.ru/ecjournal/news/867907449.html> (accessed: 14.09.2025).

may prove to be economically viable. However, issues related to its initial high cost, transportation, maintenance, and potential price volatility should not be dismissed prematurely. For instance, producing one kilogram of “green” hydrogen requires up to 30 liters of fresh water. This means that in areas with water scarcity, desalination plants or water treatment facilities will also be required. Furthermore, hydrogen must be transported through costly specific pipelines to avoid losing up to half of the energy, which implies that the infrastructure must be built almost from scratch⁶³.

Due to the existing difficulties, the demand for “green” hydrogen is currently low. However, by 2030, South Africa is to build production facilities capable of supplying enough hydrogen to simultaneously power up to 7 million households. Overall, South Africa nourishes plans to use “green” hydrogen for various purposes: from producing fertilizers for farms to providing energy for factories and fueling heavy trucks⁶⁴. Moreover, this promising clean fuel can serve as an energy storage medium to help balance the intermittency of renewable energy sources, and products made from it, such as ammonia and methanol, could be exported [Dyantyi-Gwanyanya et al. 2025].

It is also important to underscore that hydrogen can only be considered “green” if the main prerequisite is met—its production must harness energy exclusively from renewable sources, namely, solar, wind, or hydropower. It seems that the vicious cycle has come full circle.

CONCLUSION

The production of electricity from renewable sources can, to some extent, offset the costs associated with addressing the electricity deficit. However, the long-standing energy crisis cannot be approached lightly, relying solely on “green energy,” as it will not be able to fully satisfy the diverse needs of the state. According to the estimates by the Eskom, by 2032, the installation of new, predominantly renewable, generation capacity will require more than 14,000 km of high-voltage power lines and 170 transformers, which will cost approximately 210 billion rand. For South Africa, abandoning fossil fuel sources of energy is tantamount to disregarding its own resource potential at the expense of the economy and—quite possibly!—to its independence in decision-making on the global stage.

In contemporary South Africa, the issue of sustainable energy supply has become a subsidiary coin in the political game among South African political forces. Although the origins of the energy crisis are largely seen in the same way by most political actors (negligence, corruption, incompetence), the methods for resolving the remaining crisis differ. The situation could be remedied by maintaining a balance between the objective need to transition away from the “coal addiction” and preserving the economic viability of the coal industry, as well as public calm, which is directly influenced by a reliable

⁶³ 2023 Hydrogen Transport Comparison Report. *Listcorp*. 22.05.2023. <https://listcorp.com/asx/pv1/provaris-energy-ltd/news/2023-hydrogen-transport-comparison-report-2876613.html> (accessed: 10.05.2025)

⁶⁴ McGregor C., Douglas Young B. Green hydrogen is a clean fuel, but South Africa’s not ready to produce it: energy experts explain why. *Conversation*. 10.02.2025. <https://theconversation.com/green-hydrogen-is-a-clean-fuel-but-south-africas-not-ready-to-produce-it-energy-experts-explain-why-248777> (accessed: 03.02.2025)

electricity supply—something that is unimaginable today without the continued operation of coal plants and nuclear energy.

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Научная статья

ПОДХОДЫ ОППОЗИЦИОННЫХ ПАРТИЙ К РАЗРЕШЕНИЮ ЭНЕРГЕТИЧЕСКОГО КРИЗИСА В ЮАР: АЛЬТЕРНАТИВА АНК?

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Аннотация. Проблема энергетического кризиса в ЮАР превратилась в один из важных факторов внутриполитической борьбы. Нехватка генерирующих мощностей, недостаток компетентных кадров, широкомасштабная коррупция и другие проблемы существенно подорвали энергетическую отрасль. Это сказалось на протестных настроениях населения, став одной из причин роста популярности оппозиционных партий, обещающих найти выход из энергокризиса.

В статье рассматриваются мнения наиболее популярных оппозиционных партий ЮАР в контексте разрешения давней проблемы энергокризиса. Одним из основных материалов для анализа подходов партий к решению энергокризиса служили их манифесты 2024 г. Поскольку рассматривались точки зрения, высказанные именно в предвыборный период, все партии в данном тексте продолжают называться «оппозиционными» вне зависимости от факта вхождения в Правительство национального единства после выборов.

Взгляды южноафриканских оппозиционных партий, включая те, которые по итогам выборов 2024 г. вошли в Правительство национального единства, на пути выхода из энергокризиса нередко отличаются утопичностью и радикализмом и способны привести к непредсказуемым последствиям. В частности, в случае пропагандируемой рядом партий приватизации энергетики возникает угроза перехода атомной электростанции, подконтрольной госкомпаниям *Eskom*, в ведение частных компаний, что означает потерю государственного контроля над сверхчувствительным сектором экономики, требующим

существенных вложений в безопасное хранение и уничтожение радиоактивных отходов. Продвигаемый оппозицией упор на возобновляемые источники энергии опасен недооценкой эффективного использования ископаемых ресурсов, высокими затратами и возможным негативным влиянием некоторых типов «зеленой энергетики» на окружающую среду и человеческое здоровье.

Ключевые слова: энергетический кризис, ЮАР, «зеленая повестка», угольная энергетика, атомная энергетика, политические партии, оппозиция

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THEORY IN PRACTICE

Research article

THE ENERGY SECTOR OF THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC: STATUS, CHALLENGES, AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract. Ensuring reliable access to electricity is a critical issue for economic development and national security across Sub-Saharan Africa, and it is especially acute in the least-developed countries with high poverty rates. Energy deficits not only constrain industrial growth and limit access to basic social services such as healthcare and education but also deter foreign investment. The energy sector of the Central African Republic exemplifies the combination of structural challenges and unrealized opportunities found in Central Africa. International financial assistance is typically confined to isolated projects that neither address systemic bottlenecks nor reduce dependence on external suppliers of fuel and equipment. This article examines the current state of CAR's energy sector, analyzes its key problems, and outlines potential development trajectories. It considers short- and long-term applied strategies for endogenous, exogenous, and integrative development of CAR's energy sector based on building out energy network infrastructure, mobilizing domestic and collective capacities, and attracting strategic investors into CAR's power industry. The paper substantiates the need for and proposes approaches to an Intersectoral Energy Strategy for CAR that would factor in the level of state agency and the use of appropriate technologies. As a priority integrative pathway, it advances an economic concept for establishing an energy hub on CAR's territory that would generate and transmit electricity to neighboring countries.

Keywords: energy strategy, Central African Republic, energy infrastructure, agency, energy hub, Rosatom, African energy, mobile nuclear power plants, SMR, hydroelectric power plant (HPP), thermal power plant (TPP)

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INTRODUCTION

The development of the energy sector of the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is a strategic issue for the socio-economic growth of the African continent. African states, due to their high vulnerability to the volatility of global energy and food prices, exacerbated by the direct dependence of national currencies on reserve currencies, face a complex systemic problem of attracting additional external and internal financing for the development of energy infrastructure, including modernization and expansion of generating and transmission capacities.

According to a study by the African Development Bank, the financing gap of African energy in order to achieve the goals of sustainable growth amounts to \$35–50 billion per year, of which \$3–4 billion is needed for the development of grid infrastructure. The Africa Finance Corporation believes that the annual increase in generation added to the grid should be at least 16 GW in order to ensure economic development. According to data from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), over the last five years this increase has amounted to 4–7 GW per year¹. The growth of GDP and population in African countries outpaces that of the continent's energy sector. If financing remains at its current level, access to electricity and the industrialization of Africa by 2050 will remain at the same level as today [Sharova 2020b].

The problem of energy deficit in the countries of SSA is primarily structural in its nature. It is necessary to distinguish between supplying electricity to the population and to the service sector closely connected with it and businesses that generate added value. The growth of consumer demand not backed by payment capacity suppresses investment activity on the one hand, while on the other hand, the low level of industrialization and the absence or insufficient number of energy-intensive production projects do not stimulate the inflow of foreign direct investment into the energy sector [Dos Santos 2023]. In the opinion of the Director General of the Association of Power Utilities of Africa, Abel Didier Tella, "...The key is to align the needs of the energy sector with the needs of the industry. The presence of major buyers provides investments and covers development costs. If you only produce electricity for daily needs, it's impossible to cover the project costs"².

The most problematic African region in energy terms is Central Africa, where the Central African Republic (CAR) epitomizes all the challenges faced by the countries of this region in the energy sector [Kulaev, Affouet 2023]. Despite possessing significant energy resources, including hydropower potential and a high level of solar insolation, CAR demonstrates one of the lowest levels of electrification in Central Africa.

According to data from the African Development Bank, in 2024, there was a significant imbalance in the supply of electricity between the urban and rural population

¹ Africa Energy Review 2024. *Strategy&. Part of the PwC network*. 2024. <https://www.strategyand.pwc.com/a1/en/insights/africa-energy-review.html> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

² Core issue of Africa's energy sector: lack of major industrial consumers. *Global Energy Association*. 01.03.2023. <https://globalenergyprize.org/en/2023/03/01/core-issue-of-africas-energy-sector-lack-of-major-industrial-consumers/> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

in the CAR. The level of access to electricity in cities amounted to 34.7%, while in rural areas it only reached 1.6%. At the same time, the overall level of access to electricity in the country as a whole was only 15.7%³. As a result, a significant part of the population continues to rely on traditional sources of energy such as firewood and charcoal to meet basic needs, including cooking.

The Government of the Central African Republic is pursuing a course towards the restoration and modernization of critically important sectors of the economy and industry. Within this agenda, the energy sector occupies a priority place. Given the limited nature of domestic resources, the search for breakthrough solutions and for strategic, technological, and financial partners becomes particularly urgent. The Russian Federation is regarded as one of the main candidates for this role due to its possession of the relevant competences, comprehensive technical capabilities, ready-made solutions, and experience in implementing projects in developing countries.

The purpose of this study is a comprehensive analysis of the energy potential of the Central African Republic and the identification of promising economic and technological solutions, including within the framework of a strategic partnership between the Russian Federation and the Central African Republic in the energy sector.

The methodological basis of the study is a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach that combines qualitative analysis, field research, and analytical methods. The core of the methodology is an in-depth case study of the energy sector of the Central African Republic, considered here as a representative example of a systemic crisis in the countries of Central Africa [Kulaev, Affouet 2023]. Comparative analysis is used to compare the effectiveness and strategic feasibility of various technological solutions, such as diesel and hybrid generation, solar power plants (SPP), small hydropower plants, and small modular nuclear power plants (SMR) [Abramova, Sharova 2023: 439–440; Agoundedemba, Kim, Kim 2023: 9–11; Sharova 2024], as well as the approaches of key external actors to the development of the African energy sector [Kalinchenko 2017; Saenko 2022a; Saenko 2022b].

Statistical data obtained from current reports of international organizations (African Development Bank, World Bank), as well as the technical parameters of existing energy facilities, provide the empirical basis for the analysis carried out.

Content analysis of the strategic documents of the Central African Republic, intergovernmental agreements, and statements by officials made it possible to identify political priorities and institutional frameworks. The study also takes into account expert assessments by leading specialists in the field of energy, geopolitics, and technology transfer in African countries, presented in scholarly publications and analytical reports [Morozenskaya 2022; Pospelov 2018; Gitelman, Kozhevnikov, Visotskaya 2023: 13; Sharova 2022; Esmenjaud, Rutenbar, Mozersky 2025]. This approach makes it possible to develop robust solutions that contribute to the practical implementation of the energy transition, adapting the process to the specifics of the Central African Republic.

STATE OF THE ENERGY SYSTEM OF THE CAR

The energy sector of the Central African Republic, as in most African countries, is a state monopoly. The state-owned corporation ENERCA⁴ (Énergie Centrafricaine)

³ Central African Republic. *Open data for Africa*. 2024. <https://car.opendataforafrica.org/> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

⁴ *Energie Centrafricaine*. 2025. <http://enerca-rca.com/> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

manages electricity generation and distribution. There is no direct participation of private capital in generating capacities, and commercial interaction is limited to contract services for design, construction, equipment supplies, and technical maintenance, without equity participation in assets.

There is no unified national transmission grid in the Central African Republic; the only centralized power generation system is concentrated in the capital region and is represented by a cascade of three hydropower plants (HPPs) in the Boali area, as well as two large solar power plants (SPPs), Danzi and Sakai. All power plants and transmission lines (TLs) are operated by the state-owned company ENERCA.

The cascade of hydropower plants at Boali includes three facilities built in different historical periods. The Boali I HPP was commissioned in 1955 with the assistance of the Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia and consists of four units with a total installed capacity of 10 MW. At present, its actual output does not exceed 8.9 MW due to significant equipment wear. Boali II has been in operation since 1976; its total installed capacity is 20 MW; however, its average actual electricity generation is around 18 MW. The recently constructed Boali III HPP (April 2025⁵) has added another 10 MW of capacity, partially relieving the existing facilities of the cascade. All of these plants are connected to Bangui by an outdated 63 kV transmission line (TL) that has been in operation for more than forty years and requires thorough modernization.

The Sakai and Danzi solar power plants (SPPs) have become important projects in recent years in an attempt to partially compensate for the daytime generation deficit. The Sakai SPP, with a capacity of 15 MW, was built with funds received as a grant from the PRC and was commissioned in March 2023 by the Chinese company Tianjin Electric Power Construction. The plant provides an actual output of about 13 MW and is equipped with a battery system to partially cover evening loads⁶.

The Danzi SPP was commissioned in November 2023 with the participation of the Chinese company Shanxi Construction Investment Group Co. and financing from the World Bank under the PURCEL program⁷. The maximum installed capacity of the plant is 25 MW; however, its actual generation is at the level of 20–22 MW. Despite the fact that both plants are equipped with energy storage systems, they are able to only partially compensate for the capital's energy deficit during daytime and evening hours. Both stations are integrated into the ENERCA system, operate in the absence of smart load management, and function in conjunction with the Boali hydropower cascade.

At night Bangui continues to depend on hydropower plants, and in the event of temporary breakdowns of units at the Boali HPPs and scheduled outages, it relies on diesel generator sets belonging to ENERCA. However, as of today, only two out of six such generators are operational, with a total capacity of 5.76 MW, and their regular operation is constrained by the high fuel cost, which exceeds \$1.7 per liter. In addition, an hourly load-shedding schedule for electricity supply is applied across the districts of

⁵ Rouaud P.-O. Neo Themis relauches the Boali 3 Dam in the Central African Republic. *Africa Business+*. 01.04.2025. <https://www.africabusinessplus.com/en/823938/neo-themis-relauches-the-boali-3-dam-in-the-central-african-republic> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

⁶ Hakeenah N. La Chine met en ligne une centrale solaire en République centrafricaine. *Le Projet Afrique-Chine*. 03.05.2023. <https://projetafriquechine.com/2023/05/03/chine-centrale-solaire-republique-centrafricaine/> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

⁷ Central African Republic Inaugurates Largest Solar Power Plant in Central Africa. *Africa Energy Portal*. 24.11.2023. <https://africa-energy-portal.org/news/central-african-republic-inaugurates-largest-solar-power-plant-central-africa> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

Bangui. Under these conditions, private-sector enterprises, including hotels, stores, and small manufacturing facilities, are forced to install their own diesel generators to ensure uninterrupted operation.

The energy sector of the Central African Republic has for a long time been characterized by the extremely low quality of services provided by the state-owned company ENERCA. The key problems are prolonged power outages in the capital of up to 16–18 hours per day and the very low level of electrification in the country as a whole (8%), which in the capital reaches 35% and outside it only about 2%. The financial sustainability of the sector is undermined by high technical losses (7% in transmission and 33% in distribution), incomplete cost recovery due to a low average tariff (\$0.14 per kWh), and weak payment collection at the level of 67%⁸. This situation forced the government of the Central African Republic to attempt liberalization of the energy sector, which, however, has not been implemented in practice.

The legal framework for the regulation of the energy market is formed by a set of applicable normative acts. Its basis is the Energy Code of 2005, which defines the rules for the production, transmission, distribution, import, export, and sale of electric power and also allows private producers to enter the market⁹. The institutional structure of the sector is established by Decree No. 07.276 of 1 October 2007, which approved the status of the autonomous regulator ARSEC and confirmed its administrative and financial independence¹⁰. Regulation of independent generation, including the procedure for issuing permits and grid access for private producers, is established by Decree No. 10.095 of 18 March 2010¹¹. In addition, an Agency for the Promotion of Biofuels has been created in the CAR, and this market is regulated¹². The strategic guidelines are approved in the National Energy Policy Document (DPEN)¹³.

An analysis of the financing of key energy projects in recent years shows the predominance of state–donor funding. However, in 2025, there is a trend towards a transition to more complex forms of partnership. With the support of the Power Africa program, a public–private partnership with Kube Energy was formalized in 2024 for the development of two regional solar power plants in Bria and Bouar with an estimated capacity of 2.75 MW and 3 MW, respectively¹⁴. At the same time, in August 2025, the company Global South Utilities from the United Arab Emirates announced the start of

⁸ CAR Emergency Electricity Supply and Access Project. Implementation Completion and Results Report. *World Bank*. 18.12.2024. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099121924112038518/pdf/BO_SIB1dbdb1cd801919df014221470797fa.pdf (accessed: 01.09.2025)

⁹ Ordonnance № 05.001 portant Code de l'électricité de la République Centrafricaine. *Ministère des Finances et du Budget RCA*. 01.01.2005. https://www.finances.gouv.cf/sites/default/files/inline-files/Code_Electricite.pdf (accessed: 01.09.2025)

¹⁰ Décret n° 07.276 Portant approbation des statuts de l'Agence autonome de regulation du secteur de l'électricité en République Centrafricaine. *FAOLEX*. 2007. <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/caf107437.pdf> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

¹¹ Trade Policy Review: Central African Republic (WT/TPR/S/445). *World Trade Organization*. 2022. https://www.wto.org/french/tratop_f/tpr_f/s445-05_f.pdf (accessed: 01.09.2025)

¹² Loi № 08.018 du 6 juin 2008 Sur les biocarburants en République Centrafricaine. *FAOLEX*. 06.06.2008. <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/caf126420.pdf> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

¹³ Troisième Communication Nationale de la République Centrafricaine à la CCNUCC. *UNFCCC*. 2023. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/TNC%20VF%20FR.pdf> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

¹⁴ Power Africa Supports the First Energy Sector Public Private Partnership in the Central African Republic. *Power Africa*. 2024. <https://powerafrica.medium.com/power-africa-supports-the-first-energy-sector-public-private-partnership-in-the-central-african-de6cc0d8c310> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

construction of an independent 50 MW solar power plant with an energy storage system in Sakai (Sakai-2)¹⁵.

Outside the capital, the energy situation in the CAR is characterized by fragmentation and dependence on diesel fuel. Electricity supply is provided exclusively on a local basis: each settlement is fed from its own source, if one exists, or has no access to electricity at all. Individual enterprises outside Bangui, primarily in the mining, agro-industrial, and wood-processing sectors, are forced to provide themselves with electricity through their own diesel or gasoline generators, as well as by constructing small solar power plants and micro-HPPs.

Among the towns where power generation facilities have been installed in recent years, Berbérati and Bambari stand out. In both cases hybrid generation units have been built, combining solar panels and diesel generator sets. The plants provide up to 1.8 MW of installed capacity and are oriented towards priority facilities: administrative buildings, medical institutions, water supply points, and military installations. During the daytime the main load is borne by the solar power plant, while at night energy supply is reduced to a minimum and backup power is provided through diesel generator sets. These facilities are designed for an extremely limited circle of consumers and are not intended for the connection of the private sector or small manufacturing enterprises.

In other regional centers, such as Bouar, Boda, Mbaïki, and Béloko, small diesel power stations with capacities from 0.15 to 0.25 MW have been installed. This equipment was supplied under humanitarian programs or from extra-budgetary sources, is located within the administrative perimeter, and is managed by the local authorities. Electricity is supplied according to a schedule, subject to the availability of diesel fuel. Owing to the acute shortage of fuel in the country and the local authorities' lack of funds to purchase it, the equipment is often not actually operated or is switched on for only a few hours a day and only for strategic consumers (medical institutions, the administration, military facilities).

The only settlement that imports electricity is the town of Mobaye, located on the border with the DRC, where part of the electricity is supplied via a cross-border line from the Congolese system with a transfer volume of about 0.63 MW. However, this line is unstable, does not cover peak load, and de facto operates on the basis of an oral agreement, without a secure contractual mechanism. Any disruptions on the supplier's side lead to the immediate interruption of the power supply in the town.

Thus, the total installed generation capacity in the Central African Republic is currently declared at 80.69–82.69 MW but in practice does not exceed 70–72 MW¹⁶ (*Table 1*).

At the opening of the Danzi solar power plant, the leadership of the Central African Republic stated that the target level of optimal generation capacity for electrification in the country is around 250 MW¹⁷.

¹⁵ UAE firm begins construction of 50 MW solar project in Central African Republic. *Emirates News Agency*. 18.08.2025. <https://www.wam.ae/en/article/bl9awvr-uae-firm-begins-construction-solar-project-central> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

¹⁶ Centrafrique: la capacité d'électrification passe de 60 à 70 mégawatts. *Africa24*. 01.04.2023. <https://africa24tv.com/centrafrique-la-capacite-deelectrification-passe-de-60-a-70-megawatts> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Table 1. **Electrification in the Central African Republic**

Locality	Type of generation	Actual capacity, MW	Comment
Bangui	HPP	8.9	Boali I hydropower plant (about 95 km from Bangui). Consists of 4 units of 2.5 MW each
	HPP	18	Boali II hydropower plant (about 95 km from Bangui). Consists of 4 units of 5 MW each
	HPP	10	Boali III hydropower plant (about 95 km from Bangui). Consists of 2 units of 5 MW each
	SPP	20–22	Danzi solar power plant (about 35 km from Bangui). Maximum output 25 MW
	SPP	13	Sakai solar power plant (located in Bangui). Maximum output 15 MW
	TPP	5.76	Two out of six diesel generator sets with a capacity of 2.88 MW each are operational
Berbérati	Hybrid (solar + diesel)	1.8	Operated by municipal authorities
Bambari	Hybrid (solar + diesel)	1.8	Operated by municipal authorities
Bouar	DGS	0.2	Operated by municipal authorities
Mbaïki	DGS	0.25	Operated by municipal authorities
Béloko	DGS	0.2	Operated by municipal authorities
Boda	DGS	0.15	Operated by municipal authorities
Mobaye	–	0.63	Receives electricity from the Democratic Republic of the Congo
Total:		80.69 – 82.69	

Source: compiled by the authors based on AfDB, ENERCA and publicly available reports. The total capacity is an estimate.

Commentary: HPP – hydropower plant; SPP – solar power plant; TPP – thermal power plant; DGS – diesel generator set.

According to various expert assessments, this figure appears insufficient; it would be enough to cover the growing household needs of Bangui and its suburbs but is clearly inadequate to launch energy-intensive industries such as cement and metallurgical plants, processing complexes, cold chains for export products, logistics infrastructure, and other needs even within the capital agglomeration. For comparison, in 2023 the installed capacity in neighboring Cameroon, the DRC, and the Republic of the Congo amounted to 1.8 GW, 3.23 GW, and 842 MW, respectively¹⁸. Without a guaranteed reserve capacity, enterprises cannot plan round-the-clock production cycles, and investors are reluctant to invest in deep processing of raw materials and the creation of value-added chains.

¹⁸ Production d'électricité. *Country Economy*. 2025. <https://fr.countryeconomy.com/energie-et-environnement/electricite-production> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

“THE VICIOUS CIRCLE” OF ENERGY POVERTY

Under the current conditions, investment in the construction of processing and manufacturing enterprises proves economically unjustified already at the stage of developing a feasibility study. The high cost of diesel generation (up to \$0.45 per kWh), the systemic dependence on irregular fuel supplies, transport constraints, and price fluctuations do not allow for reliable and large-scale use of diesel generation, especially in regions located far from the capital. This has a negative impact on the development of small and medium-sized businesses, particularly in rural areas, leading to rising prices, increasing social inequality, a decline in the overall investment attractiveness of the country, and a minimization of economic activity outside the CAR capital, Bangui.

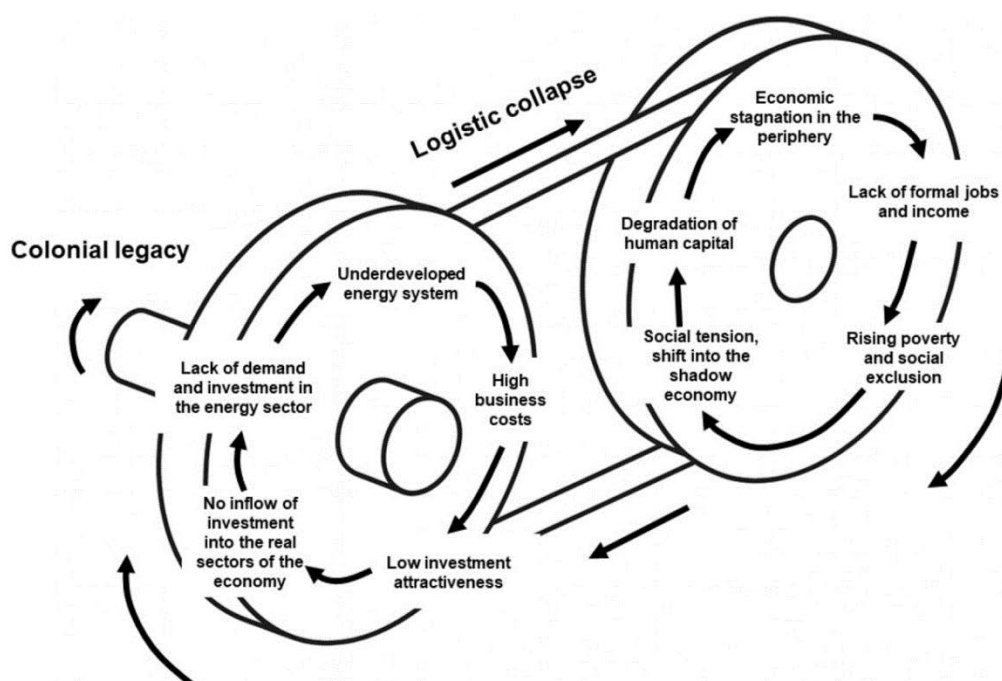


Figure 1. Systemic relationship between energy deficit, poverty and logistical collapse

Source: compiled by the authors

Thus, the development of the CAR energy sector is not so much a separate area as a necessary (*sine qua non*) condition for attracting investment into any other sphere of the Republic's economy. The underdeveloped energy system inherited from the colonial past generates high costs for businesses and reduces investment attractiveness, which hinders the inflow of capital into the real sector and leads to a lack of investment in energy. At the same time, social effects intensify: the absence of jobs increases poverty and gives rise to informal employment, leads to the degradation of human capital, and entrenches economic stagnation on the periphery. Both cycles mutually reinforce each other, forming a closed loop system that leads to a logistical collapse and undermines sustainable development. The two cycles are linked through logistical collapse, which acts not merely as a consequence but as a transmission mechanism between energy backwardness and social stagnation. Underdeveloped infrastructure limits access to energy and economic resources, complicates the transportation of goods and services, intensifies the isolation of the periphery, and prevents an exit from this dependency (*Fig. 1*).

In the current geopolitical and economic situation in the CAR, international financial institutions and donor organizations, in particular the World Bank, the African Development Bank (AfDB), and the European Union (EU), play a defining role in the implementation of energy projects. Financial support is provided both through the opening of targeted credit lines and through the provision of grants and humanitarian assistance, with a particular emphasis on the development of small and autonomous energy installations. Limited payment capacity and arrears on existing loans significantly constrain the possibilities for attracting new resources, creating a vicious circle of dependence on external financing.

In 2016, the Government of the CAR launched the reconstruction of the energy sector¹⁹, including the attraction of international financing, which made it possible in 2018 to initiate the Project for the Modernization of Water Supply and Electricity (PASEEL)²⁰; in 2019, the Emergency Project for Electricity Supply and Access (PURACEL)²¹, under which the Danzi SPP was built and commissioned; and in, 2022 the currently operating Project to Strengthen the Power Sector and Improve Access in the CAR (PARSE), which provides for the installation of five mini-grids with a total capacity of 10 MW in the towns of Nola, Bouar, Bossémbélé, and Bangassou, the reconstruction of transmission networks, and the expansion of the capacity of the Danzi SPP to 40 MW²². Nevertheless, these measures are critically insufficient to overcome the systemic energy crisis.

CENTRAL AFRICAN POWER POOL

The Central African Republic is a member of the Central African Power Pool (Pool Energétique de l'Afrique Centrale, PEAC), one of five regional African power pools²³ created between 1995 and 2005 with the aim of establishing a pan-African electricity transmission infrastructure functioning as a single market. According to the Russian economist A. Sharova, "...despite the relative success of the Southern African Power Pool, the development of regional markets is proceeding at a slow pace. Their effective functioning is hampered by a number of factors, namely: (1) a shortage of generating capacities, underdeveloped energy infrastructure, and weak diversification of energy sources; (2) a deficit of investment in generation, transmission, and distribution of electricity; (3) the initial stage of liberalization of electricity markets and a lack of trust between states; (4) a preference for bilateral agreements over regional ones" [Sharova 2020a: 1157]. In this context, the Central African Power Pool demonstrates all of these limitations, being the weakest of the five African pools; and within it, the Central African Republic occupies the last place in terms of country-level electrification.

¹⁹ Takouleu J.-M. Electrification: Central Africa remains the continent's soft spot. *Africa Energy Portal*. 28.05.2024. <https://africa-energy-portal.org/blogs/electrification-central-africa-remains-continents-soft-spot> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

²⁰ Water and Electricity Upgrading Project. *World Bank*. 2025. <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P162245> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

²¹ CAR Emergency Electricity Supply and Access Project. *World Bank*. 2025. <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P164885> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

²² Renewables Boost Sustainable Development in the Central African Republic and The Gambia. *World Bank*. 10.02.2025. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2025/02/10/renewables-boost-sustainable-development-in-the-central-african-republic-and-the-gambia> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

²³ SAPP in Southern Africa, WAPP in West Africa, EAPP in East Africa, PEAC in Central Africa, and COMELEC in North Africa.

PEAC is a specialized agency of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS/CEEAC), responsible for the implementation of energy policy, for research and the construction of energy infrastructure, and for organizing electricity exchanges among the eleven countries that are members of the pool. At present, the PEAC portfolio includes 28 integration infrastructure projects (PIP) and 13 electrification projects (PPET)²⁴, most of which have the status of “awaiting financing” or “planned”. The CAR is involved in the implementation of eight projects (Appendix 1).

ASPECTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CAR ENERGY SECTOR

The development of socio-economic infrastructure, including the energy sector, is one of the key priorities of the CAR, as reflected in the National Development Plan of the Republic for 2024–2028 (NDP–CAR)²⁵. The Plan provides for strengthening the institutional and regulatory framework of the sector; improving ENERCA’s technical and commercial performance; developing energy infrastructure; promoting decentralized systems and renewable energy sources; constructing fuel storage facilities in the regions of the country; upgrading the qualifications of specialists; implementing energy efficiency measures; conducting research and strategic planning; supporting the private sector in order to disseminate solutions in the field of autonomous and solar energy; and creating a consumer protection association.

According to the NDP–CAR, the implementation of energy policy, the Investment Plan up to 2040, and the National Energy Strategy is necessary in order to optimize the institutional environment. At the time of writing, however, Plan-2040 and the National Strategy have not been published publicly and remain under development.

The main emphases in the NDP–CAR are placed on the optimization of the legal and institutional framework of the Republic’s energy system, aimed at regulating decentralized electricity production, aligning with PEAC policy, developing tariff policy, and strengthening the role of the Ministry of Energy and Water Resources (MDERH) in regulating the energy market. This will require changes to the regulatory and legal framework and to technical standards, which will entail amendments to existing legislation and the creation of a legal basis for renewable energy sources and an energy efficiency system. At the same time, great importance is attached to improving the efficiency of ENERCA’s activities and upgrading the qualifications of its employees.

The development of energy infrastructure includes projects such as increasing the capacity of the Mobayi dam, the construction of small hydropower plants, as well as the construction of two hydropower plants, BAC and LOTEMO, on the Lobaye River. In order to improve the stability of electricity distribution, it is planned to connect local power grids with the DRC. The promotion of decentralized systems and renewable energy sources includes the launch of pilot mini-grid programs, the promotion of decentralized solar energy, and the development of subsidized programs for autonomous systems and clean cooking technologies. These measures are aimed at increasing the level of electricity access to 42% by 2028.

²⁴ Pool énergétique de l’Afrique Centrale. *Institution Spécialisée de la Communauté Economique des Etats de l’Afrique Centrale (CEEAC)*. <https://peac-ac.org/projets/> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

²⁵ Plan national de développement: 2024-2028. *Food Security Cluster*. 2024. <https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/PND%20FINAL.pdf> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

A special role in the NDP–CAR is assigned to the construction and restoration of fuel storage infrastructure for hydrocarbon-based power generation, in particular in Kolongo, which will make it possible to build up fuel reserves in order to minimize the risks of global price fluctuations, reduce shortages, and address logistical constraints. The law enforcement and fiscal authorities are tasked with combating fraud and smuggling in the energy sector.

The budget of the “NDP–CAR 2024–2028” amounts to \$12,797 million, of which a total of \$4000 million (31.3% of total expenditures) is allocated for the development of transport, social, and energy infrastructure: \$400 million in 2024, \$680 million in 2025, \$880 million in 2026, \$1,040 million in 2027, and \$1000 million in 2028²⁶. The sources of financing for the National Development Plan budget are state funds, which account for 20% (\$2600 million), and domestic and foreign private capital, which accounts for 30% (\$3800 million). The remaining 50% (\$6400 million) constitutes a budget deficit, which is theoretically planned to be covered by development banks, international financial institutions, and foreign bilateral state investments²⁷.

According to this plan, the strategic avenue for supplying the Central African Republic with electricity is solar and hydropower, which, according to expert estimates, has a potential of 2000 MW (less than 1% is currently utilized). For the Central African Republic, where abundant solar insolation is combined with the absence of centralized power grids, solar energy is the most obvious option for addressing the problem of electrifying remote areas of the country [Abramova, Sharova 2023: 439–440; Agoundedemba, Kim, Kim 2023: 9–11].

However, significant constraints reduce the effectiveness of solar energy as the main solution for the CAR. The principal drawback of SPPs is their fundamental inability to provide a stable baseload and their high-cost price. The absence of generation at night and the sharp drop in output during the rainy season or under heavy cloud cover creates a critical dependence on backup sources of power generation. Large-scale energy storage remains economically prohibitive, given the high cost of modern battery energy storage systems (BESS). In addition, the technical capabilities of SPPs are insufficient for the creation and development of energy-intensive industries that require round-the-clock supply of tens of megawatts of electricity. Despite high insolation, the apparent simplicity, and widespread promotion of SPPs as an effective solution, solar energy in its current form can only address local low-capacity power supply tasks and cannot serve as a strategic response to systemic challenges.

In this regard, the introduction of distributed generation systems that are not affected by meteorological factors is the main avenue of the development of the electric power sector. Such systems, in contrast to solar power generation, provide a stable energy supply regardless of weather conditions.

One of these promising solutions is the construction of small hydropower plants (HPPs) [Sharova 2024]. The Central African Republic has a developed and geographically diverse hydrological network formed by the river basins of the Ubangi, Mbomou, Kotto, Uele, Sangha, and their numerous tributaries. These rivers are characterized by a stable seasonal regime and a pronounced gradient and flow mainly in unregulated channels, which makes it possible to use their potential without the need to construct large dams and diversion canals. The combination of these characteristics

²⁶ Plan national de developpement: 2024–2028. *Food Security Cluster*. 2024. <https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/PND%20FINAL.pdf> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

²⁷ Ibid.

makes the country's territory favorable for the deployment of mini-HPPs in the capacity range from 50 kW to 3–5 MW. According to a UNIDO report, the estimated technical potential of small hydropower (≤ 10 MW) in the CAR is about 41 MW. Over a 1–3-year horizon, a program consisting of four mini-HPPs with a total capacity of 2.05 MW has been confirmed for implementation²⁸.

Small hydropower plants (HPPs) of a mobile containerized design are advantageous in that they do not require fuel and have low operating costs. According to energy studies, such units are capable of operating for decades, providing round-the-clock generation with minimal technical maintenance. With a service life of up to 25 years and a cost of electricity generation below \$0.04 per 1 kWh, these plants become an economically efficient solution. A systematically deployed network of mini-HPPs can cover up to 30–40% of the baseload in remote regions that have so far not been electrified, including the creation of new social and industrial infrastructure facilities. With a minimal number of generation points, the country gains the possibility to build a distributed power system that is not vulnerable to centralized failures.

Soviet Africanist scholars used to advance a strategy of thermal generation based on fossil fuels, relying on the intra-African energy market, and of hydropower generation in regions with high hydropower potential, particularly in Central Africa [Fedorov 1975: 81–83; Sagoyan 1989: 89–90]. The use of solar, wind, and geothermal energy, according to their forecasts, would develop not for industrial use but for meeting the needs of the population [Goncharov 1982: 139].

PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF NUCLEAR ENERGY

The deployment of small modular nuclear power plants (or small modular reactors, SMRs) in the Central African Republic appears to be a promising technological solution. Small-capacity nuclear power plants are nuclear power plants with an installed capacity from 10 to 60 MW with the possibility of scaling, designed in the form of a modular transportable unit intended for installation in areas without centralized power grids and without access to liquid fuel. They are capable of operating under extreme climatic conditions and temperatures²⁹.

At present, the Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation Rosatom is the world leader in the production of SMRs. The estimated service life of all plants is at least 60 years, which guarantees the long-term and reliable operation of the energy infrastructure. These units, which use innovative energy solutions, are capable of operating on a single fuel load for 7–10 years, minimizing the need for frequent maintenance and refueling. The installation of the plants takes 24–36 months.

A separate promising avenue is mobile transportable micro nuclear power plants with a capacity of 1–10 MW (scalable up to 20 MW), delivered as a turnkey ready-to-use solution and intended for remote areas. The main advantage of such nuclear power plants is the simplicity of deployment and a very high degree of autonomy. A distinctive feature of these energy facilities is their ability to operate in a fully autonomous mode without the permanent presence of personnel throughout the entire fuel cycle, which is 8 years or

²⁸ World Small Hydropower Development Report 2022. *UNIDO*. 2022. <https://www.unido.org/WSHPDR2022> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

²⁹ Small Nuclear Power Plants. *Rosatom*. 2025. (In Russ.). <https://rusatom-overseas.com/ru/smr/> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

more. Among the most thoroughly developed solutions on the global market, the Russian project “Shelf-M” 30 stands out: a power plant with an electric capacity of 10 MW (with a thermal capacity of 35 MW) and a refueling interval of at least 8 years. For the CAR, this class of sources can cover “targeted” loads with a minimal volume of construction and installation work and shortened commissioning periods and, if necessary, allows the relocation of the module as territories and projects develop.

In the long term, small-scale nuclear power is undoubtedly one of the priority solutions for the CAR, but in the current and short-term perspective, the construction of an SMR unit with a capacity of 55 MW solely for the needs of the CAR is an unfeasible project, since its estimated cost exceeds \$0.5 billion³¹. It should be noted that at present only two countries in Africa, South Africa (an operating nuclear power plant) and Egypt (a nuclear power plant under construction), are actually developing nuclear generation.

APPLICABLE STRATEGIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CAR ENERGY SECTOR

The development of the country’s energy sector must be regarded as part of state economic policy, which requires devising an energy transition strategy for the CAR that should become part of the long-term socio-economic development plan of the state. The strategy must be cross-sectoral and be based on realistic, well-grounded road maps with substantiated sources of financing. An example may be the “Energy Strategy of the Russian Federation up to 2050”³².

Taking into account the challenges and problems facing the CAR, as well as the need to use breakthrough solutions, we shall consider adapted (applicable) strategies for the development of the CAR energy sector in the current and medium-term periods. In this situation three approaches are possible: the first is an exogenous path, focused primarily on attracting external financing (this is the basis of the NDP–CAR); the second is an endogenous path, based above all on reliance on the country’s own resources (the concept of Self-Reliance, SR); and the third is an integration model (the concept of Collective Self-Reliance, CSR). In the elaboration of applicable energy strategies (AES), it is necessary to take into account the concept of adapted, or appropriate, technology [Schumacher 1973]. A fundamental issue here is the agency of the CAR.

The discourse on African agency is becoming more and more relevant today in the context of the growing role of Africa in world politics and the global economy. In this context, the development of the energy strategy and tactics of the CAR must be carried out at the country level, and foreign expert assessments should not be substituted by goal-setting on the part of international institutions. African agency should manifest itself not only in the implementation of regional development priorities but also in their

³⁰ Shelf-M project being developed for Sovinoe gold deposit. *World Nuclear News*. 2023. <https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/Shelf-M-project-being-developed-for-Sovinoe-gold> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

³¹ The price parameters of the project for the construction of an SMR with a capacity of 55 MW near the settlement of Ust-Kuyga in Yakutia, approved by Rosatom, have been used, since the harsh climatic conditions of its construction and operation are similar to those of a hypothetical project in the CAR. The total cost of the project amounts to 75.4 billion rubles.

³² Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of 12 April 2025 No. 908-r. *Government of the Russian Federation*. 12.04.2025. (In Russ.). <http://static.government.ru/media/files/LWYfSENa10uBrrBoyLQqAAOj5eJYIA60.pdf> (accessed: 20.10.2025)

formulation. Most often, a significant part of the analytical work is carried out with external financial support and with the involvement of extra-regional consulting agencies [Degtarev 2024a]. The country's dependence on external financing and its presence in the monetary sphere of influence of France (the CFA franc) have a substantial impact on the state economic policy of the CAR.

The concept of appropriate technology [Schumacher 1973] in this case must be taken into account when assessing how adaptive and realistic the energy strategy is in relation to the technical and the internal and external political and economic conditions in which the CAR finds itself. With a GDP of \$2,752 million in 2024, the state of the Republic's economy does not allow for the effective development of the national energy sector relying exclusively on its own resources. Nevertheless, within the framework of the endogenous path, the optimal solution, substantiated by numerous countries' practices, is the development of domestic and cross-border transmission infrastructure linked to planned and under-construction power plants, which would stimulate the growth of generation.

In developed countries, where access to electricity stands at 99.9%, the primary step is the installation of power plants, which leads to the construction of transmission infrastructure, whereas in developing countries with decentralized energy systems and limited access to electricity, the opposite is true: the creation of transmission networks stimulates the growth of generation [Pospelov 2018: 268]. According to the African Development Bank, the cost of transmission infrastructure amounts to approximately 8–10% of the cost of generating capacity, which appears to be an acceptable burden for the CAR economy and fits within the infrastructure budget of the NDP–CAR³³. By making the development of a unified domestic and cross-border transmission network, linked to planned power generation sites, a priority of its energy strategy, the CAR can also make a leap forward in the development of its own energy system.

A strategic priority of the CAR's energy policy should be the modernization of existing and the construction of new fuel storage facilities for small thermal power plants with capacities of up to 20 MW, operating on diesel, coal, natural gas (LNG), and biofuels. The deployment of such power plants is essential to support the operation of solar generation facilities, industrial projects, and mineral extraction. These measures will stabilize the cost of generation amid fluctuations in global hydrocarbon prices and will stimulate the development of thermal power plants, which in Africa constitute the fundamental basis of industrialization³⁴.

At the same time, the diversification of fuel supplies in order to eliminate dependence on French transnational corporations, which significantly reduce the level of state agency, is of particular relevance. For example, the withdrawal of *TotalEnergies SE* from the CAR market in 2022 provoked a fuel crisis in the country that could potentially have escalated into a political crisis. In addition to supplies of energy resources from extra-continental friendly non-Western countries, including Russia and India, it is advisable to diversify supplies through cooperation with the states of North Africa, Nigeria, South Africa, and Equatorial Guinea. At the same time, the use of the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (*PAPSS*) makes it possible to carry out settlements in national

³³ State of Africa's Infrastructure Report 2025. *Africa Finance Corporation*. <https://www.africafc.org/our-impact/our-publications/state-of-africa-infrastructure-report-2025> (accessed: 20.10.2025)

³⁴ According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), out of 248.3 GW of electricity produced in Africa, 184.7 GW (74.8%) came from hydrocarbon-based generation. See: Africa. Energy mix. *IEA*. 2025. <https://www.iea.org/regions/africa/energy-mix> (accessed: 20.10.2025)

currencies with conversion into the CFA franc, bypassing the euro. This mechanism minimizes for the CAR economy the risks associated with rising world import prices and fluctuations of reserve currencies.

For most African countries, ensuring genuine national sovereignty on an individual basis is a difficult task, especially when it comes to the joint development of strategic infrastructure [Degterev 2024b]. This applies equally to the energy sector as an important component of national sovereignty. In our view, the most effective energy strategy for the CAR is an integration model oriented towards CSR.

The CAR has a favorable geographical position; its neighboring states Chad, Sudan, Cameroon, the DRC, and the Republic of the Congo have a combined GDP of about \$205 billion³⁵, with an aggregate deficit of installed/available electric capacity of at least 1.1 GW (Sudan, 500 MW [[Al-Rikabi et al. 2025]; Cameroon, 100 MW³⁶; Congo-Brazzaville, 151 MW³⁷; Chad plans to import 120 MW³⁸; DRC, 250 MW³⁹).

A breakthrough solution for the CAR would be not only the creation of an internal and cross-border grid but also the organization of multi-megawatt generation projects, which, in turn, would make it possible to supply electricity to neighboring countries while at the same time covering its own demand.

Priority zones for the deployment of HPPs include the areas of Bambari (the Ouham River), Mbaïki (tributaries of the Lobaye), Berbérati (tributaries of the Sangha), as well as Ndélé and Kaga-Bandoro, where there are stable watercourses, proximity to zones of social and economic activity, and a critical need for round-the-clock power supply [Esmenjaud, Rutenbar, Mozersky 2025]. Border areas in the southeast, such as Obo, Gambo, and Zemio, are of particular importance, since plants there can supply strategic facilities, logistics hubs, and border crossings.

If the CAR concludes intergovernmental agreements on electricity supplies with the above-mentioned neighboring countries, the construction of small modular reactors becomes economically and politically feasible. The siting of SMRs must comply with Rosatom's technical requirements [Morozenskaya 2022], ensure transport accessibility, and provide an optimal distance to cross-border interconnection points with electricity-buying countries, subject to security measures. The three key locations that can serve as priority pilot sites are the capital region of Bangui, the town of Bambari in the central part of the country, and the border settlement of Obo in the southeast.

³⁵ IMF WEO 2025 estimate at current prices. Source: GDP, current prices, dollars. *International Monetary Fund*. April, 2025. <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPD@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

³⁶ Électricité: ménages et entreprises renouent avec les délestages au Cameroun, malgré les 300 MW injectés par Nachtigal. *Investir au Cameroun*. 13.01.2025. <https://www.investiraucameroun.com/energie/1301-21556-electricite-menages-et-entreprises-renouent-avec-les-delestages-au-cameroun-malgre-les-300-mw-injectes-par-nachtigal> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

³⁷ La CEC rejoint le CEIF 2025 alors que la remise en état d'une turbine à gaz touche à sa fin. *Congo Energy and Investment Forum*. 28.02.2025. <https://fr.congoenergyinvestment.com/news/cec-joins-ceif-2025-gas-turbine-overhaul-nears-completion> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

³⁸ Pacte national de l'énergie pour la République du Tchad. *World Bank*. 2024. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/808746a6d507a18c7379af60ffe07da-0010012025/original/M300-AES-Compact-Chad.pdf> (accessed: 01.09.2025)

³⁹ Plan National Stratégique de Développement (PNSD) 2024–2028. *Ministère du Plan de La République Démocratique du Congo*. 2025. <https://plan.gouv.cd/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/PNSD-2024-2028-V41.pdf> (accessed: 13.09.2025)

Bangui is regarded as a priority site due to the highly concentrated energy consumption, the presence of grid infrastructure, and relatively developed transport logistics. The placement of an SMR in the vicinity of the capital would make it possible to ensure a stable power supply to the country's administrative and economic center and would also create a basis for future export lines in the direction of Cameroon, the Republic of the Congo, and the DRC.

Bambari is of interest as a major regional hub with the potential for the creation of large industrial clusters and for integration with small hydropower projects on the Ouham River or with mobile nuclear power plants. The establishment of a network of energy facilities in this area would provide electricity to future industrial enterprises and create a foundation for integrating the eastern and central prefectures of the country into a single system. In addition, this location offers opportunities for organizing exports of electricity and goods to the northern regions of the DRC.

Obo is a strategic point on the border with the DRC. The placement of an SMR there is aimed at ensuring the energy security of border areas and creating an export link to the neighboring state. This could become a catalyst for the development of transport, logistics, and extractive infrastructure in the region. As reserve and prospective sites for subsequent stages of SMR deployment, other localities may be considered, including Bangassou, Birao, Bria, and Ndélé.

In essence, a genuine energy hub for the PEAC can be created on the territory of the CAR, based on advanced modular and mobile technologies and with the participation of Russia as a strategic investor. Provided that the Russian Federation installs several small hydropower plants and 2–3 SMRs, PEAC could assume responsibility for building the domestic grid infrastructure in the CAR as well as cross-border transmission networks. With guaranteed offtake of the electricity produced and agreed tariff levels, this investment project may become attractive in terms of profitability and payback periods. By virtue of its geographical position and Russia's involvement in ensuring comprehensive security, the CAR is an optimal location for a Central African energy hub.

This project presupposes the fulfillment of at least three conditions: the existence of cross-border interconnections (inter-system transmission grids) for the integration of national power grids; a common regulatory and legal framework (including memoranda of understanding between governments and enterprises); and a multilateral organizational structure responsible for planning, harmonizing rules, and developing the commercial basis for cross-border electricity trade [Sharova 2020a: 1159]. One of the key conditions is the liberalization of the electricity market in the CAR and the opening of access for private energy companies. This will make it possible to attract direct investment into the power sector and to recoup investments in energy infrastructure relatively quickly by selling non-strategic transmission segments to private investors through open tenders, as it was done in Brazil⁴⁰.

CONCLUSION

The energy system of the CAR is in a critical condition. Actual generation does not exceed 75 MW, while the current demand of the capital, Bangui, alone is 200 MW. The system is decentralized, and the state-owned company ENERCA is ineffective. A lack of

⁴⁰ Africa Finance Corporation. State of Africa's Infrastructure Report 2025. AFC. <https://www.africafc.org/our-impact/our-publications/state-of-africa-infrastructure-report-2025> (accessed: 01.10.2025)

financing does not allow the gradual evolutionary development of the energy sector amid a rapidly growing population and the need for socio-economic growth. In the current critical situation in the CAR energy sector, it is advisable to elaborate and implement an emergency crisis plan by analogy with the GOELRO Plan⁴¹, which was adopted by Soviet Russia in 1920. This plan was directive in nature and mandatory for implementation by all ministries and agencies. It consisted of two key parts, which included the reconstruction of the old energy infrastructure and the construction of new facilities, as well as a set of urgent anti-crisis measures. In terms of its effectiveness, this project has no analogues either in historical retrospect or in recent history.

The Central African Power Pool (PEAC) is experiencing structural problems related to a lack of financing and an energy deficit and is not in a position to participate in solving the CAR's problems. The absence of significant industrial, agricultural, and mining projects with confirmed financing does not stimulate investment in the energy sector. The National Development Plan of the CAR for 2024–2028 incorporates a budget deficit of 59%.

Under these conditions, it is necessary to elaborate an effective medium- and long-term intersectoral energy strategy (IES) for the country, with clearly identified sources of financing, which takes into account both the leadership's capacity to take the necessary decisions (agency) and appropriate technologies (AT) for the local and regional electricity markets. Taking all these factors into account, and given the three main approaches to shaping the IES (exogenous, endogenous, and integration), the most effective option, in the authors' view, is their symbiosis based on Self-Reliance (SR) with further development towards Collective Self-Reliance (CSR), where the attraction of external financing should be based on the import of technologies and equipment while organizing systemic financing (portfolio investments, multilateral development institutions, *IPO*, *IBO*). The IES is aimed at building the energy sovereignty of the CAR, while the Anti-crisis Energy Plan (AEP) is aimed at ensuring energy security in the short and medium term.

One practical medium-term solution could be the creation in the CAR of an energy hub to supply electricity to the CAR and its neighboring countries (Chad, Sudan, Cameroon, the DRC, and the Congo) at a minimum, and to *PEAC* at a maximum. This requires, above all, the political will of the leadership of the states participating in the proposed consortium, the support of the African Union and Pan-African development finance institutions, and the presence of a strategic technological investor. The participants in the consortium could be national energy corporations and oil-producing companies, subject to appropriate state guarantees and co-financing. The Russian Federation, represented by the State Atomic Energy Corporation Rosatom and PJSC RusHydro, has the capacity to become a strategic partner of the CAR in the development of the energy sector at the key stages of the project [Kalinchenko 2017].

The energy history of Central Africa is not a story of deficit but of untapped potential. For long-term investors, the energy sector of Central Africa offers a share in the industrial transformation of one of the major energy systems in the not-too-distant future. The turning point has matured. Africa needs not only more energy but also greater investment ambition to match the scale of its opportunities!

⁴¹ Gvozdetkii V.L. "GOELRO plan." *Great Russian Encyclopedia 2004-2017*. (In Russ.). https://old.bigenc.ru/domestic_history/text/2374264?ysclid=mgbwv563go553163996 (accessed 3.10.2025)

Supplementary materials to the article⁴²: Appendix 1. PEAC projects involving the Central African Republic.

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⁴² Supplementary materials to the article are posted on the official website of the Journal of the Institute for African Studies (<https://africajournal.ru/>) on the article’s webpage.

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Научная статья

ЭНЕРГЕТИКА ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОАФРИКАНСКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКИ: СОСТОЯНИЕ, ПРОБЛЕМЫ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

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Аннотация. Обеспечение устойчивого доступа к электроэнергии представляет собой критически важную проблему экономического развития и национальной безопасности для всех государств, но для наименее развитых стран Африки к югу от Сахары с высоким уровнем бедности эта проблема стоит особенно остро. Энергетический дефицит не только сдерживает промышленный рост и ограничивает доступ населения к базовым социальным услугам, таким как здравоохранение и образование, но также препятствует притоку иностранных инвестиций. Энергетический сектор Центральноафриканской Республики (ЦАР) является одним из примеров сочетания структурных вызовов и нереализованных возможностей, существующих в странах Центральной Африки. Международная финансовая помощь, как правило, ограничивается точечными проектами, не решающими системных проблем и не устраняющих зависимость от внешних поставщиков топлива и оборудования. В данной статье исследуется текущее состояние энергетического сектора ЦАР, анализируются его проблемы и потенциальные направления развития. Рассматриваются краткосрочные и долгосрочные применительные стратегии эндогенного, экзогенного и интеграционного развития энергетического сектора ЦАР на основе строительства энергетической сетевой инфраструктуры, опоры на собственные и коллективные силы, привлечения стратегических инвесторов в энергетику ЦАР. Обосновываются необходимость и подходы к разработке межотраслевой энергетической стратегии ЦАР, учитывающей уровень агентности (*agency*) государства и адаптированные (*appropriate*) технологии. В качестве приоритетного интеграционного направления развития энергетического сектора страны в статье предлагается экономическая концепция создания на территории ЦАР энергетического хаба, генерирующего и передающего электроэнергию в соседние с республикой страны.

Ключевые слова: энергетическая стратегия, Центральноафриканская Республика, энергетическая инфраструктура, агентность, энергетический хаб, Росатом, энергетика Африки, мобильные АЭС, АСММ, ГЭС, ТЭС

Персональный вклад авторов: совместное исследование.

Конфликт интересов: авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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