

Does the African Union need a Foreign Policy?



INTEGRATE AFRICA
—ADVISORY SERVICES—
CONSULT | RESEARCH | CONTRACT



● Introduction



Whether one supports or opposes it, the African Union (AU) is progressively establishing itself as an effective advocate for continental positions on various issues. It is gaining traction as an emerging global player. The AU symbolizes Africa's collective identity globally and its aspirations for a peaceful, prosperous, and integrated continent.



For Africa to be a global player, rather than just a playground, requires strategic and coordinated approaches to foreign policy.



Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma

The AU's inclusion in the G20—an international forum comprising governments and central bank governors from 19 countries and the European Union—signifies Africa's expanding economic and political influence and recognizes the continent's ability to influence global agendas.

Furthermore, the ongoing discussions about Africa's potential to secure a permanent seat on the UN Security Council underscores this progress, especially when considering the AU's G20 inclusion. The UN Security Council, responsible for maintaining international peace and security, has been criticized for not having an African permanent member, even though the continent regularly features in its deliberations.

As the AU's role expands from fostering political and economic integration and ensuring peace within Africa to acting as a global foreign policy representative, it reinforces the imperative for the AU to adopt a robust and unified foreign policy to adeptly handle its burgeoning responsibilities.

● Historical Context

Africa has been adept and agile in the face of existential threats. In response to pressing continental issues and the need for development, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was established. The OAU's main accomplishments revolved around eradicating colonialism and promoting unity and solidarity among African states.

However, as the continent faced evolving challenges, the need for a more integrated strategy became apparent, giving rise to the AU in 2001. Its mission: to accelerate political and socio-economic integration across Africa. Yet, achieving a unified voice and action has been fraught with challenges, especially due to diverse political stances among member states.

Historical disparities and differing political ideologies occasionally resulted in fragmented foreign policy approaches. Past efforts to create a shared African viewpoint frequently highlighted the need for a more structured foreign policy approach.

Given the changing global landscape and the AU's increasing role internationally, there is a clear necessity for a unified AU foreign policy to ensure Africa remains a strong voice on the global stage.

● The AU and the G20

The G20, representing the world's major economies, has a paramount influence on international financial stability. Covering around 85% of global GDP and over 75% of international trade, its decisions have profound global repercussions.

Initially focusing on global economic governance, the G20 agenda has expanded to address climate change, sustainable development, global health, and digitalization. Its annual summits promote coordination in economic policies among members, targeting holistic global growth. Notably, during financial upheavals like the 2008 crisis, the G20 played a pivotal role in world economic stability.

The AU's inclusion in the G20 highlights the continent's growing economic prominence. To maximize this position, the AU needs a common foreign policy on key G20 matters. Such policy ensures clarity on global issues, amplifies Africa's bargaining power, and augments the AU's global reputation.



“

Africa's past has been about borders drawn by others; its future should be about policies crafted by Africans themselves.

”

Prof Ali Mazrui

● The Potential of a UN Security Council Seat

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is a crucial organ of the UN, making decisions with profound global ramifications. Its permanent members, holding veto powers (namely the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, China, and France), mirror the geopolitical dynamics of the mid-20th century, now increasingly seen as antiquated.

Africa, with 55 countries, represents over a quarter of the UN membership and contributes significantly to UN peacekeeping efforts, yet it lacks a permanent UNSC seat. A permanent would address Africa's underrepresentation, magnifying its global influence, facilitating effective conflict resolution strategies, strengthening pan-African unity, promoting equity and fairness, and fostering a more integrated and cohesive continent.

In the intricate realm of global geopolitics, the urgency for Africa to establish a well-defined foreign policy doctrine is palpable. This doctrine provides consistent decision-making, ensuring that Africa remains steadfast on global issues, even in the face of unforeseen challenges. With its rich mosaic of cultures, Africa requires a foreign policy that encapsulates this diversity, presenting a unified voice in global dialogues. Furthermore, amidst the plethora of global challenges, a meticulously crafted doctrine facilitates strategic prioritization, channeling Africa's resources effectively.

In international relations, credibility is invaluable. A transparent foreign policy enhances Africa's global standing, fostering trust and enabling partnerships. Moreover, a values-driven doctrine asserts that Africa's perspectives are anchored in enduring principles rather than fleeting advantages or alliances, thereby refining its global reputation and moral position in international debates.

“
More than ever,
Africa needs to
speak with one
voice, act in unison
and avoid divisions.

Kofi Annan

● Challenges and Considerations in Formulating a Continental Foreign Policy

The pursuit of a unified foreign policy for the African continent faces numerous challenges, originating from its inherent diversity, the complexities of global geopolitics, and the tension between national sovereignty and collective decision-making.

Africa's rich tapestry of nations, each with unique interests and priorities, makes crafting a unified foreign policy challenging. Its member states vary significantly in economic structures, from resource-rich nations to those dependent on agriculture or services. The continent's myriad political systems, rooted in differing colonial legacies, have given rise to a range of foreign policy affiliations.

Striking a balance between national sovereignty and collective decision-making poses a dilemma. A unified foreign policy may necessitate member states to relinquish some policy autonomy for broader benefits, a sacrifice some might resist.

Understanding the nuances of global geopolitics is crucial. Africa's multifaceted relationships with global powers necessitate a careful approach to ensure some relationships are jeopardized in the process of fortifying others. Divergent views on international institutions like the International Criminal Court or the World Trade Organization add layers to this complexity. Moreover, ensuring that regional powers like Nigeria, South Africa, and Egypt do not overshadow small nations is essential for equity.

Historically, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, European powers arbitrarily partitioned Africa, leading to divisions and subsequent external exploitation. Post-independence, many African nations found themselves manipulated in the larger Cold War narrative.

Learning from the European Union (EU) could be insight for the AU. The EU, despite its 27 diverse member states, has achieved unparalleled political integration in modern history. This unity was epitomized by their Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which emerged as a cohesive voice in the post-Cold War landscape. The CFSP allowed the EU to address global crises collectively, impose sanctions on countries violating international norms, and navigate internal disagreements, showcasing the potential benefits of unified policy-making.

● Recommendations

To address the aforementioned challenges, the AU should consider establishing a high-level task force comprising diplomats, scholars, and experts. This team would draft a preliminary unified foreign policy doctrine, operating within a clear mandate and timeline and consulting with various stakeholders: member states, civil society, academia, and the private sector.

Investing in the training of diplomats and foreign affairs officials is critical. They must understand the unified policy's nuances, guaranteeing consistent global representation. Given the ever-changing nature of international politics, a periodic review mechanism for the policy is paramount. Moreover, implementing a rigorous monitoring and evaluation system can assess the policy's efficacy, allowing for needed refinements.

AU member states should harmonize their national foreign policies with the AU's overarching strategy. However, this demands understanding national priorities within the broader context of Africa. Comprehensive policy reviews, aided by experts, can help to ensure this alignment. To further champion regional cohesion, member states might establish regional and continental unity departments, ensuring they have the necessary resources.

Public campaigns should educate citizens about the benefits of a unified foreign policy, countering colonial biases. Encouraging dialogue between member states, particularly those with historical tensions, is essential for trust-building. Regular feedback to the AU will ensure the foreign policy remains both adaptive and responsive to the continent's needs.

● Conclusion

The AU stands at a defining juncture. While its G20 inclusion signifies Africa's growing global prominence, this is not just about global representation. The EU's history offers insights into the power of regional integration. Yet, Africa's quest for a unified foreign policy is complicated by colonial legacies and diverse national interests. However, with political will, public support, and compromise, these challenges can be overcome. The potential of a UNSC seat for Africa is significant, but navigating its intricacies is vital. A robust and unified foreign policy is key for Africa to realize its global influence. This journey, though complex, promises substantial rewards.

“ Africa's voice is stronger when sung in unison. ”

Dr. Amina Mohamed

About the Author



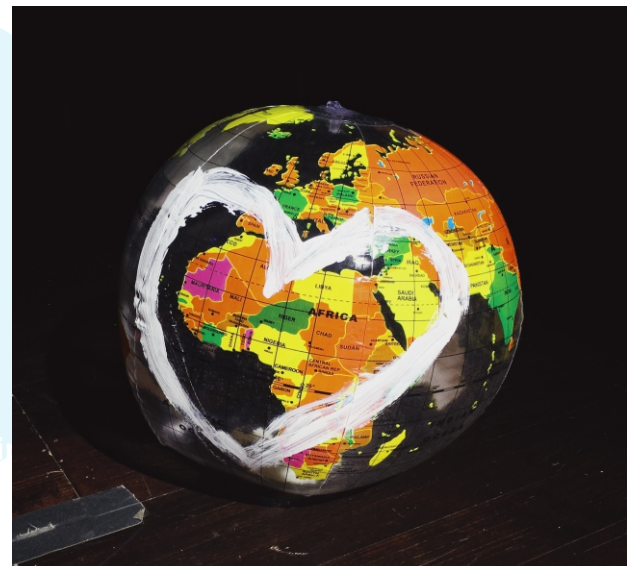
Dr Remember Miamingi is a co-founder and CEO of Integrate Africa Advisory Services and a former advisor within the Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department of the African Union.

Dr Miamingi is a graduate of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria, and holds a Master of Laws and Doctor of Laws Degree from the University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa.

About Integrate Africa Advisory Services

Integrate Africa Advisory Services (IAAS) is a leading pan-African consulting firm headquartered in Johannesburg, South Africa. We assemble a team of African experts, strategists, political and policy analysts, researchers, and communicators, each with significant government and diplomatic experience and specialized knowledge in African integration. Our diverse expertise allows us to offer tailored advisory, research, and contracting services in areas such as African Union laws and policies, peace and security, economic integration, and geopolitical strategies.

IAAS's mission is to empower Africans, African organizations, pan-African institutions, African Union member states, and international organizations. We aim to help them anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and adapt their engagement strategies to maximize the opportunities and mitigate the risks associated with African integration.





afrikamoja.africa