JOURNAL OF PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION (JPCR)

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY GOVERNANCE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN SECURITY IN AFRICA

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Abstract

International security governance is an important dimension to meet contemporary security concerns, including armed conflicts, terrorist attacks, political crises, humanitarian crises and forced displacement. Despite all the security structures that have been expanded internationally and regionally, there are still many African states that are beset with serious human security issues. The study highlights the implications of global security governance on human security in Africa with focus on the role of international and regional institutions in supporting peace, security and human welfare. The study adopts a qualitative research approach and is underpinned by Human Security Theory, Security Governance Theory and Regional Security Complex Theory, and utilizes documentary analysis of literature, policy documents, institutional reports and selected African case studies. The study investigates the role of the United Nations, African union and other institutions in conflict prevention, peace keeping, humanitarian intervention and post conflict reconstruction. Results show the impact of global security governance on conflict resolution, peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance in Africa. But its spirit is limited by the lack of funding, weak local engagement, lack of foreign dependence, geopolitical interests, and weak state capacities. The study therefore concludes that models for sustainable human security must be people-centred; regional ownership must be strengthened; institutional cooperation must be boosted and inclusive governance structures must be developed in Africa. It contributes to the knowledge of the challenges and limitations in the global governance of security in the face of emerging African security challenges.

Keywords: International Security Governance, Human Security, Africa, Peacekeeping, African Union, United Nations, Conflict Management.

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INTRODUCTION

The post-Cold War international system has experienced a significant integration in the understanding and management of security issue. Traditional mode of security approaches, which majorly emphasized state sovereignty, military capabilities, and interstate conflicts, have gradually increased into broader frameworks of international security governance involving countries, global organizations, regional institutions, civil society groups, and other non-state actors (Krahmann, 2003). Modern security issues including terrorism, transnational crime, humanitarian crises, forced migration, climate-related threats, and economic instability show that security can no longer be restricted to territorial protection. Instead, it rapidly incorporates issues that has to do with human welfare, dignity, development, and survival.

This broader understanding added to the emergence of the human security approach, which shifts focus from state security to the protection of individuals from both violent and structural threats in the globe. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) presented human security as a framework that emphasizes freedom from fear, freedom from want, and the protection of human dignity (UNDP, 1994). Thérien (2012) further contends that human security creates a more comprehensive understanding of security by tackling social, economic, political, and environmental vulnerabilities fraught with individuals and communities.

Africa remains a major area where international security governance mechanisms have been extensively enforced through institutions including the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and other global partners. These institutions have added to peacekeeping, conflict prevention, humanitarian intervention, and post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Need to stress here that, despite these interventions, many African countries continue to experience insecurity arising from armed conflicts, terrorism, political instability, poverty, displacement, and humanitarian emergencies. This has generated contention concerning whether international security governance genuinely aids human security or reinforces foreign dependence and unequal power cooperation between the Global North and Global South.

International security governance is the collection of institutions, norms, rules, and actors that are saddled in managing security issues beyond the control of individual states. It indicates

cooperation among governments, global organizations, regional bodies, and non-state actors in tackling security problems that are beyond national boundaries (Krahmann, 2003).

Human security is the protection of individuals from critical menaces affecting their survival, livelihoods, and dignity. According to the UNDP (1994), human security consists of seven major segments: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. The concept challenges traditional military-focused security approaches by emphasizing the everyday vulnerabilities fraught by individuals and societies (Thérien, 2012).

The Global South describes developing areas, such as Africa, Asia, Latin America, and parts of the Middle East, that share historical experiences of colonialism, uneven development models, and marginalization within international political and economic structures (Dados & Connell, 2012). These historical realities enhance their involvement and experiences within international security governance systems.

Existing literature shows that security governance has become rapidly characterized by cooperation among multiple actors operating at local, regional, and international levels (Krahmann, 2003). Weiss and Wilkinson (2018) note that the post-Cold War era has witnessed the expansion of international institutions and security networks aimed at tackling complex security issues.

Scholars of human security posit that modern threats including terrorism, poverty, disease outbreaks, environmental degradation, and forced migration require approaches that transcend military reactions (UNDP, 1994; Newman, 2023). However, studies on the Global South indicate that developing states occupy a complicated position within international security structures. Whilst they benefit from peacekeeping operations and foreign security aid, they are also affected by unequal decision-making processes and dependency relationships (Acharya, 2014).

Some scholars contend that foreign-designed security interventions frequently fail because they do not sufficiently consider local contexts and indigenous panaceas (Chandler, 2006; Richmond, 2011). Hence, debates continue regarding whether international security governance upholds human security in Africa or reproduces current international inequalities.

The study adopts the use of qualitative research design relied on documentary analysis. Data are collected from peer-reviewed academic publications, books, policy documents, United Nations reports, African Union publications, and other institutional reports published between 2001 and 2025. Sources are selected based on relevance, credibility, and their connection to international security governance and human security challenges.

The materials obtained are examined through thematic content analysis, targeting on major themes such as security governance structures, institutional effectiveness, peacebuilding programs, human security outputs, and governance issues. The qualitative approach enables an in-depth understanding of the relationship between international security governance and human security conditions across African societies. However, the study acknowledges weaknesses related with dependence on secondary sources and available documented evidence.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of the literature on international security governance and human security in general and focus on Africa and the Global South specifically. It assesses the evolution of the security studies field from state-focused studies to a wider concept of governance that engages global organizations, regional institutions, and non-state actors. The chapter also underscore arguments revolve around the effectiveness of international security interventions in tackling human insecurity and develops the theoretical foundation guiding the study.

International Security Governance

International security governance refers to the institutions, norms, rules and actors that are engaged in the governance of security matters that exceed the ability of individual States (Krahmann, 2003; Weiss & Wilkinson, 2018). Whereas the traditional security model focuses on military strength and state sovereignty, the current security governance perspective requires interaction between governments, international organizations, regional organizations, civil society groups and transnational players.

The fall of the Cold War helped security studies to spread from interstate warfare to encompass political, economic, environmental, terror, and humanitarian insecurity (Buzan & Hansen, 2009). Krahmann (2003) argues that the current security governance is a dynamic of de-centralisation from State-centered power to multi-actor networks. Likewise, Weiss and Wilkinson (2018) highlight the need for coordinated responses on global, regional and local levels to address contemporary security challenges.

In Africa, security governance has been expanding in both form and capacity, with the African Union (AU) as well as regional organizations filling gaps in the international system in addressing conflict and instability, alongside it (Monteh, 2024). As such, international security governance is a network of common responsibilities among a variety of actors and institutions.

Global Security Governance and the Global South

The link between global security governance and the Global South is still a contentious issue. According to Acharya (2014), developing countries are not simply passive actors in international security practices, but rather they are actively engaged in defining global security practices via regional cooperation and institutional development. On the other hand, Ayoob (2002) notes that in developing nations, the security issues tend to occur not as a result of classic interstate conflicts, but from the conditions of weak institutions, political instability and problems in state building.

Duffield (2001) offers a critical analysis, claiming that the international security interventions commonly blend development and security goals in a manner that deepens outsiders' involvement in the developing world. These views suggest that although Global South countries are engaged in active security governance, they remain under the influence of global power relations that remain unequal.

Security and Human Security in Africa

The experiences in Africa with armed conflicts, terrorism, displacement and humanitarian crisis, continue to make this continent a key priority of discussions on international security governance. International organizations, like the United Nations, African Union and others have organized peacekeeping, mediation, and reconstruction programmes throughout the continent.

The African Union has also enhanced continental security cooperation through the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) (Williams, 2018), and regional organizations are playing more active role in conflict prevention and peace operations (Dersso, 2021). The effectiveness of these interventions is however debatable. Many of the security problems in Africa are blamed on weak institutions, corruption, problems with governance, and socioeconomic disparities by Francis (2006) and problems with local ownership of the externally driven interventions are cited by Mkandawire (2010).

The failures of international interventions to address structural roots of insecurity are reflected in the continued insecurity in Somalia, Mali, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, while the peacekeeping operations in other countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone have helped to reduce the violence. (United Nations, 2021; African Union, 2023). Hence, the need for improving institutions, engaging local participation, and expanding development agendas for sustainable human security.

Theoretical Framework

The study draws on three theories that are complementary: Human Security Theory, Critical Security Studies and Global Governance Theory. The UNDP (1994) developed human security theory, which takes the individual as the starting point for security analysis and would measure security in terms of protection from violence, poverty, disease, displacement and environmental risks. It is relevant for the analysis of the question of whether international security governance contributes to human welfare.

Critical Security Studies breaks from the paradigm of traditional security studies by exploring power relations, the question of inequality, and the political nature of security threats (Booth, 2007; Wæver, 1995). According to Booth (2007) emancipation from structure is a key to true security.

Global Governance Theory addresses the governance of international security challenges in institutions, norms and networks that operate across the state line (Rosenau, 2003; Weiss, 2013). It offers understanding of the role of the United Nations, the African Union, and other African organisations in African security policies. These theories can be combined to create an analytical framework that connects international security governance to policy implementation, state responses and to human security outcomes.

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE

Concept of Security Governance Architecture and UN Security System

Security governance architecture is the institutional structure in which various actors are involved in creating, coordinating and executing security policies. It comprises formal institutions, international norms, regulatory frameworks, and networks that help to deal with security problems which are beyond the capability of individual states (Krahmann, 2003). The contemporary security governance differs from the traditional one in that the latter is diffused across states, international organisations, regional institutions, civil society and private actors (Weiss & Wilkinson, 2018).

The complexity of threats like terrorism, cyber insecurity, pandemics, organized crime and insecurity due to climate change, mandates collective responses, not individual state responses. In today's security governance, Acharya (2014) states that there is a shared responsibility, institutional cooperation, and multi-level decision making.

The United Nations (UN) is the main body of global security governance because of its function in keeping international peace and security (United Nations, 1945). The UN has been actively involved in conflict prevention, sanctions, peace enforcement and post conflict reconstruction through a variety of means including the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and peacekeeping missions (Weiss, 2013).

The UNSC is the main decision-making organization concerning international peace and security. It holds the authority to approve peacekeeping missions, to make sanctions and to approve collective action under Chapters VI and VII of the UN Charter (United Nations, 1945). The Council has been criticized for carrying out historical power dynamics as the five permanent members have veto power, which limits the ability to take collective action and develop a more balanced representation of developing nations (Luck, 2018; Hurd, 2020).

UN peacekeeping operations are still one of the most prominent tools of international security governance. Missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone helped bring about conflict stabilization, democratic transition and institutional rebuilding (Fortna, 2008; United Nations, 2021). Yet, mission effectiveness has been hindered by a variety of factors such as limited resources, slow deployment, weak enforcement mechanisms, and reliance on powerhouses (Bellamy & Williams, 2022). The expatriation of the UN mission in Mali highlighted the challenges of maintaining peace in complex security settings (United Nations, 2023).

African Regional Security Organisations

Regional security institutions have emerged as indispensable elements of the security governance system in Africa. There are institutions that have mechanisms for resolving the conflict such as the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) (Dersso, 2021; Williams, 2018).

In 2002, the African Union (AU) was set up to implement the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA): comprising the Panel of the Wise, African Standby Force, Continental Early Warning System, and Peace and Security Council. The AU has provided assistance to peacekeeping missions, mediation and election observation in various countries, including Somalia, Sudan, and the Central African Republic (African Union Commission, 2024). It is limited, however, in its effectiveness, due to financial reliance on external partners, logistical constraints and institutional capacity limitations.

ECOWAS has become one of the most vibrant regional security groups in Africa. The ECOWAS conflict prevention mechanisms have acted in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger (Aning & Edu-Afful, 2023). However, the recent military coup and the sanctions dispute have shown conflicts on security issues and democratic governance in the region (International Crisis Group, 2024).

IGAD has also actively contributed to the Horn of Africa in the resolution of conflicts in Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia. Nevertheless, there are ongoing political issues between member states and its limited institutional capacity (Healy, 2023). The West offers support in two ways. There are two ways that the West provides support: 3.5 Western Security Alliances and International Financial Institutions.

NATO, among other western security alliances, engages in military cooperation, intelligence sharing, training and capacity building. Military cooperation, intelligence sharing, training and capacity building are all ways western security alliances, particularly NATO, contribute to African security governance. NATO's counter-piracy operations and security partnerships illustrate how NATO is helping to respond to transnational threats. However, critics claim that external security interventions can be motivated by strategic interests of the west or can create relationships of dependency (Acharya, 2014; Chandler, 2006).

Security outcomes are also shaped by the influence of international financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on security through development financing, economic reforms, and state-building programmes. Even though economic stability provides a foundation for good governance and lower risks of conflict (Collier et al., 2003), external reforms can lead to reduced local ownership and greater social tensions (Duffield, 2001; Richmond, 2011).

The involvement of Non-State Actors in Security Governance

In the era of modern security governance, non-state actors such as humanitarian organisations, private security firms and armed groups are also playing an increasing role. In conflict-affected regions, NGOs play important roles in humanitarian assistance, conflict mediation and peacebuilding (Barnett, 2011). But the issue of accountability and dependence on donors is still a concern.

Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) also have become an important player, offering security services, training, and logistics. They can help to address institutional gaps, but issues of accountability and human rights violations are also important (Avant, 2005). Armed groups, like Boko Haram, Al Shabaab, and ISWAP, also impact on security governance through their capacity to impact state action, counterterrorism policies, and international engagement processes (Mampilly, 2011; Arjona et al., 2015).

While promoting cooperation, international security governance is still characterised by unequal power relations. Corporations like the UN Security Council represent inequalities in the world in terms of unequal representation, and the fact that one of the countries has a veto (Hurd, 2020). African security institutions also continue to be extremely reliant on external sources of funding, which restrict their autonomy and regional ownership (African Union Commission, 2024).

Ultimately, international security governance has positively impacted on Africa with regards to peacekeeping, conflict management and institutional development. Yet it is constrained by ongoing problems like weak institutions, external dependence and unequal decision-making processes which prevent it from becoming a sustainable human security entity. Achieving a more robust and resilient security governance in Africa will, thus, need to be more African and more holistic.

HUMAN SECURITY IN AFRICA: DIMENSIONS, CHALLENGES, AND REALITIES

The relevance of human security in Africa derives from the fact that many security challenges are rooted in structural conditions such as weak institutions, inequality, poverty, and governance failures rather than interstate conflicts (Ayoob, 2002). The UNDP (1994) identifies human security as protection from chronic threats and sudden disruptions affecting human life. In Africa, economic deprivation, environmental pressures, and political exclusion frequently interact to create conditions that increase vulnerability to violence and instability.

Scholars differ regarding the causes of insecurity in Africa. While Ayoob (2002) and Francis (2006) emphasize internal factors such as state weakness and governance failures, other scholars highlight the role of external interventions, global inequalities, and geopolitical interests in shaping African security outcomes (Duffield, 2001; Acharya, 2014). Thus, human insecurity in Africa is both internally generated and externally influenced.

Economic and Political Insecurity

Economic insecurity remains one of Africa's major human security challenges. Despite economic growth in some countries, widespread poverty, unemployment, and limited economic opportunities continue to affect millions of people. The World Bank (2024) reports that hundreds of millions of people in Sub-Saharan Africa remain in extreme poverty. High youth unemployment and dependence on informal economies further increase vulnerability and social exclusion (African Development Bank, 2024).

Economic insecurity also has security implications because poverty, inequality, and unemployment can increase susceptibility to criminal activities, political unrest, and recruitment by armed groups (Collier et al., 2003).

Political insecurity is another major challenge. Weak institutions, corruption, electoral violence, and unconstitutional changes of government undermine democratic governance and public trust. The resurgence of military coups in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Gabon demonstrates continuing institutional fragility in parts of Africa (African Union Commission, 2024; ISS, 2024). Political instability weakens state capacity, disrupts service delivery, and increases vulnerability to insecurity.

Armed Conflict, Terrorism, and Displacement

Armed conflict and terrorism remain among the most severe threats to human security in Africa. Regions such as the Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, Horn of Africa, and eastern Democratic Republic of Congo continue to experience insurgencies and violence involving armed groups and terrorist organizations (Williams, 2018; ACLED, 2025).

The Sahel has become one of the world's most unstable regions, with terrorist groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda and Islamic State contributing to increased violence and humanitarian crises (ACLED, 2025). Similarly, Boko Haram and ISWAP have displaced millions of people across Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, despite regional counterterrorism efforts (UNHCR, 2025).

The consequences of conflict extend beyond physical violence to include destruction of infrastructure, food insecurity, educational disruption, and health challenges (UNOCHA, 2024). These conflicts are often linked to governance failures, economic exclusion, and weak institutions rather than ideology alone (Francis, 2006).

Environmental and Health Security

Climate change has emerged as a significant human security challenge in Africa. Rising temperatures, droughts, flooding, and desertification threaten agriculture, livelihoods, and social stability (IPCC, 2023). In the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, environmental pressures have intensified competition over resources and contributed to conflicts between farming and pastoralist communities (International Crisis Group, 2024).

Health insecurity also remains a major concern. Weak healthcare systems, inadequate infrastructure, disease outbreaks, and limited access to medicines continue to affect human wellbeing across the continent (WHO, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic exposed inequalities in global health governance, particularly Africa's dependence on external sources for vaccines and medical supplies (Africa

CDC, 2024). Health insecurity therefore affects not only survival but also economic productivity and social development (Newman, 2023).

Gender, Migration, and External Interventions

Gender inequality significantly influences human security outcomes. Women and children are disproportionately affected by conflict, poverty, and displacement, with gender-based violence remaining a major concern in conflict zones such as Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (UN Women, 2024). However, women also contribute significantly to peacebuilding and community resilience through initiatives supported by the Women, Peace and Security agenda (African Union Commission, 2024).

Forced migration is another major manifestation of insecurity. Africa hosts millions of refugees and internally displaced persons due to conflicts, environmental pressures, and political instability (UNHCR, 2025). Displacement creates challenges related to healthcare, education, employment, and humanitarian assistance.

External interventions through the United Nations, African Union, and international partners have contributed to peacekeeping, humanitarian relief, and development support. However, scholars argue that externally driven approaches may sometimes prioritize international stability over local needs and weaken local ownership (Duffield, 2001; Richmond, 2011).

CASE STUDIES OF INTERNATIONAL SECURITY GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN SECURITY IN AFRICA

This chapter examined how international security governance operates in practice and its implications for human security outcomes in Africa. Using four comparative case studies—Nigeria/Lake Chad Basin, the Sahel, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)—the study assessed whether international interventions have improved human security or primarily reinforced state-centered security priorities. These cases were selected because they represent major African security crises characterized by armed conflict, terrorism, displacement, and extensive involvement by international and regional institutions (ACLED, 2024; UNDP, 2023).

Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin (2009–2025)

The Lake Chad Basin crisis emerged from the Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria in 2009 and later expanded into Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. The conflict was sustained by weak governance, poverty, youth unemployment, and limited state presence (International Crisis Group, 2023; Cilliers, 2021). International security governance responses included the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), African Union support, United Nations humanitarian coordination, and development programmes by organizations such as UNDP and the World Bank (African Union Commission, 2023; UNDP, 2024).

Although military operations reduced insurgent territorial control, human security conditions remain fragile. Over 3 million people have experienced displacement, while food insecurity, educational disruption, and economic hardship continue to affect communities (UNHCR, 2024; UNICEF, 2024). The case demonstrates that military responses alone cannot address deeper structural causes of insecurity.

The Sahel Region (2012–2025)

The Sahel crisis developed after the 2012 Mali conflict and expanded into Burkina Faso and Niger due to jihadist insurgencies, governance failures, climate pressures, and political instability. International responses included the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), France's Operation Barkhane, and the G5 Sahel Joint Force (UN Security Council, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2024).

Despite extensive international involvement, insecurity has expanded, and displacement has increased. More than five million persons have been displaced across the central Sahel, while food insecurity and climate-related pressures continue to intensify vulnerabilities (UNHCR, 2024; FAO, 2024). The Sahel illustrates the limitations of military-centered approaches when governance weaknesses and socioeconomic inequalities remain unresolved.

Somalia (1991–2025)

Somalia represents one of Africa's longest cases of international security intervention. Following state collapse in 1991, the country experienced civil conflict, humanitarian crises, and the emergence of Al-Shabaab. International responses have included

the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), later replaced by ATMIS, United Nations assistance, and counterterrorism operations by external partners (Call, 2020; African Union, 2022).

Although international interventions prevented complete state collapse and supported institutional rebuilding, Somalia continues to experience significant human insecurity. Over 3.8 million people remain internally displaced, while droughts, food insecurity, and limited access to basic services persist (OCHA, 2024; FAO, 2023). The Somali experience demonstrates that security stabilization must be accompanied by long-term governance and development strategies.

Democratic Republic of Congo (1996–2025)

The DRC conflict reflects the relationship between local insecurity and global economic interests, particularly competition over valuable minerals such as cobalt, coltan, and gold (UN Group of Experts, 2024). Despite the presence of MONUSCO and regional initiatives, eastern Congo continues to experience armed violence and humanitarian crises.

The DRC hosts one of the world's largest displacement crises, with more than seven million internally displaced persons (UNHCR, 2024). Sexual violence, weak governance, and armed-group activities remain major challenges. Research indicates that peacekeeping operations can reduce immediate violence but often struggle to address deeper structural causes of conflict (Autesserre, 2021).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that international security governance has contributed significantly to conflict management, peacekeeping, and humanitarian assistance in Africa. However, its ability to produce sustainable human security remains limited because interventions frequently prioritize military stabilization over social development and institutional transformation (UNDP, 2024).

The research contributes theoretically by integrating Human Security Theory, Critical Security Studies, and Global Governance Theory to explain why security interventions may strengthen states while leaving populations vulnerable. It also contributes analytically through comparative examination of four major African security contexts. The study recommends adopting a human-centered security framework that prioritizes education, healthcare, livelihoods, and social protection.

African regional institutions such as the AU and ECOWAS should strengthen financial independence and operational capacity to reduce dependence on external actors (African Union Commission, 2024). Global security institutions should also be reformed to increase African representation and participation in decision-making processes (Weiss & Wilkinson, 2023).

Finally, sustainable security requires addressing structural drivers of insecurity, including poverty, corruption, unemployment, inequality, and climate vulnerability. Future research should further examine climate security, cybersecurity, private security actors, and locally driven peace building approaches. Ultimately, the study concludes that Africa's security future depends not only on managing conflicts but on transforming security governance into a system that protects both states and human dignity (UNDP, 2024; African Union Commission, 2024).

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