From liberal interventionism to stabilisation: A new consensus on norm-downsizing in interventions in Africa

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Abstract: This article traces recent changes of the practices and justifications of the use of force in intervention, in the context of African security governance, highlighting how these changes interact with norm transformations at the scale of the global order. In doing so, it conveys how a long-standing pattern of norm contestation between international and African actors over external intervention vs sovereignty, has started to give way to a mutually accepted division of labour. After 9/11, the paradigm of liberal interventionism has been incrementally replaced by the framework of stabilisation, with a re-prioritisation of sovereigntist agendas. This has increased collaboration between international and African actors, specifically prompting the United Nations and the African Union to divide tasks of mandating and enforcement, thereby increasing inter-institutional 'order'. This consensus, however, far from signifying wider compliance with 'liberal ordering' principles, rather indicates the need to revisit central assumptions of the International Relations norm diffusion literature. While the latter emphasises the diffusion of 'good' international norms, especially pertaining to human rights and democratisation, the growing consensus on 'intervention as stabilisation' instead exposes how post-9/11 justifications of practices that carry the potential to downsize the scope of such norms, are starting to resonate across international, regional and national sites of policy and practice.

Keywords: political science; international organisations; peace operations; norm diffusion; norm downsizing; counterterrorism; stabilisation; human rights; Africa

I. Introduction

Security governance in Africa constitutes a dense web of interactions between national, sub-regional, regional, and international actors – with

the African Union (AU) being the key regional actor in this web, and the United Nations (UN) holding the supreme international authority. In fact, both the AU and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) belong to the most 'authoritative' international organisations (IOs) in the contemporary global governance system (Zürn 2018: 108–10). Resulting institutional overlaps, along with differing doctrines and historical trajectories, suggest high potential for regulatory competition and 'interface conflicts' involving 'positional differences between actors about the prevalence of different international norms' (Kreuder-Sonnen and Zürn, this issue).

The most controversial issue in this regard has been whether, when, how and for what purposes the interventionary use of force should be mandated. Not only is this a matter on which regional and international doctrines as well as claims to authority overlap. It is, moreover, a matter placed at the core of controversies over intervention, as it touches upon the relationship between sovereignty and external influence/domination.

During the post-Cold War era of liberal interventionism, many Western democracies increasingly engaged in military interventions that have been justified with 'liberal' norms and values, including the enforcement of human rights and liberties, the spread of democracy, and the enforcement of a law-based international order (Geis *et al.* 2013). Interface conflicts have been activated on a number of occasions during this period, especially when international actors have sought to justify the use of force in so-called 'humanitarian interventions' with reference to human rights and protection norms. The AU and African state leaders have tended to oppose the international interventionary use of force and instead emphasised the primacy of political settlement, negotiation and the sovereign equality of member states. Indeed, norm collision between external intervention, and the use of force in particular, on the one hand, and sovereignty, on the other, has historically been central in shaping African–international relations.

We argue that this long-standing conflictive pattern has started to change. Specifically, we show that with the rise of a new generation of interventions, reframed under the banner of 'stabilisation', the international preparedness to use force in interventions has increased,[1] while norm-related interface conflicts between African and international actors in fact appear to have decreased. What we observe instead, is a growing pragmatic convergence between these actors regarding the use of force to defeat and regain territory

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[1] This increase is marked by interventions with 'more expansive mandate(s) to use military force' and a growing willingness to undertake or support action 'beyond traditional readings of peacekeeping lore' (Hunt 2017: 109; see also Bellamy and Hunt 2015; Karlsrud 2019a and 2019b).

from armed non-state competitors. Such a stability-driven interventionism, we demonstrate, rather than pitting interventionism against state sovereignty, offers new opportunities for African actors to reclaim sovereignty, while allowing international actors to defer risky and controversial enforcement as well as counterterrorism tasks to regional actors.

In executing this argument, we explore what the main drivers of this development are, and assess its practical and normative implications. We do so through a focus on the inter-organisational interaction underpinning two key periods of interventionism. Firstly, the post-Cold War period of contested liberal interventionism – explored through zooming in on the transition from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the AU, with the related 'negotiations' over the human rights agenda and the rise of protection norms. Secondly, and with reference to interventions in both East and West Africa, we trace the post-9/11 shift towards more consolidated, but arguably less 'liberal', stabilisation approaches within the justificatory framework of counterterrorism.[2]

In doing so we contribute an empirically grounded perspective on the question of how changes in the 'normative context' at the macro scale of the global order interact with micro-scale practices of intervention and related justifications of the use of force. Specifically, we tease out how normative change at the global scale affects the conditions – both as opportunities and constraints – under which interventions and the use of force take place; as well as how different intervention actors contest, make use of, adapt to or co-produce, such changing conditions and opportunity structures.

Additionally, we show that the contemporary African–international convergence on the reframing of intervention as stabilisation, far from signifying compliance with 'liberal ordering' principles, or the consolidation of human rights and democratisation norms, rather indicates that it is warranted to revisit some of the central assumptions of International Relations norm diffusion research.

We demonstrate, that post-Cold War contestations over interventions in Africa espoused certain normative components commonly considered foundational of the liberal world order, in that they fed into processes of norm proliferation and the localisation of human rights as well as democratisation norms. Yet, in contrast to this, the recent growing convergence on counterterrorism-driven stabilisation approaches is accompanied by

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[2] Evidently, these are not clearly delimited or separate periods, just as 'humanitarian intervention' and 'stabilisation' are often not clearly distinguishable or delimited approaches (neither temporally nor content wise). Yet, within the scope of this article these temporal markers usefully allow structuring our inquiry into the interaction between global and local sites of norm transformation.

justifications of practices that carry potential to *limit* the scope of these established norms, starting to resonate across international, regional and national sites of policy and practice (see also Heller *et al.* 2012). We conclude that this process, turning norm diffusion theory on its head, is indicative of a wider ongoing reordering of the global political landscape, and of related normative turbulences surrounding liberal internationalism itself.

We proceed as follows. The following section outlines our analytical frame, combining a focus on normative transformation with a securitisation perspective. Next, we analyse how changes at the scale of the global order interact with practices of intervention in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 periods, allowing us to unpack the transformation from contested norm proliferation to an emerging 'global–local' consensus on norm downsizing.

II. Conflict and cooperation under conditions of normative transformation: The analytical frame

In the fields of international peace and security governance, policy makers and analysts alike have commonly treated cooperation and convergence among IOs as a policy objective in itself (de Coning and Friis 2011). This aligns with a wider post-Cold War emphasis on institutional collaboration as the most promising approach to addressing international collective matters – such as peace and security – thereby turning organisational collaboration into 'an emerging norm of good governance in international affairs' (Biermann 2011, quoted in Biermann and Koops 2017: 12). Similarly, much attention has been given to the role of IOs as 'norm diffusers'; i.e. collective institutional actors promoting convergence on particular standards for appropriate behaviour, across scales (international, national) and from 'Global North' to 'Global South' settings (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998).

However, underlying this bias towards collaboration and convergence as ends in and off themselves (Biermann and Koops 2017: 12) is an implicit assumption about the relative stability of the wider normative context. Specifically, the prevalence of 'good' international norms, upon which states, organisations and other international actors gradually can converge and collaborate, is often assumed.

Yet, recent scholarship on norm 'downsizing'[3] (Wiener 2018: 152; Liese 2009), the 'dark side of normative argumentation', or the development of 'bad norms' (Heller *et al.* 2012; Heller and Kahl 2013), as well as on the

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[3] A norm may remain 'stable' as a formal 'visible norm container' while it is, simultaneously, 'downsized' in regard to its actual moral and practical reach (Wiener 2018: 132).

decline of the liberal world order (Ikenberry 2018) and the turn to pragmatic interventionism (Moe and Stepputat 2018) offer diverging perspectives. A key proposition of these approaches is that the post-'9/11' context is marked by normative transformations, and probable erosion of human rights norms, emanating from within what is widely assumed to be the 'liberal core' of norm diffusers (Dunne 2007: 276; Liese 2009). These arguments add to earlier perspectives advocating a move beyond an exclusive focus on norm *compliance* and *diffusion*, to also explore 'situation[s] in which compliance conditions are challenged', as these 'offer [...] an empirical access point for studying changes in the normative structure of world politics' itself (Wiener 2004: 189).

We draw on, and contribute to, these debates, by combining a focus on changes in the wider normative context, with a 'zooming in' on particular sites of conflict and collaboration in regard to intervention practices. In doing so, we respond to propositions in the critical norms literature to adopt 'practice-based' and 'interactional' approaches (Goodale 2007; Brunnée and Toope 2010; Wiener 2018), thereby expanding focus from analysing *discursive* norm acceptance/conflict to tracing how norms are (or are not) *acted upon* and implemented in practice (see also the interface conflict framework, Kreuder-Sonnen and Zürn, this issue). Accordingly, we *assess*, rather than *assume*, the relationship between different patterns of practice and interaction (conflictive/collaborative), on the one hand, and wider norm dynamics, on the other. We combine this outlook on norms and normative change with a securitisation perspective, and show how these processes – i.e. norm proliferation and securitisation – are in some respects analogous (see also Heller and Kahl 2013), as both involve the trickling[4] of frames, and ideas, with behaviour-structuring effects, across international, regional and local sites.

Our analysis of the post-Cold War period traces micro-dynamics of conflict between international and African actors, with overlapping authority on issues of peace, security and interventionary use of force, as well as diverging interpretations of the human rights and protection agendas. This analysis conveys the interrelatedness of norm conflicts, conflict management strategies, and norm proliferation processes.

In turn, keeping with the focus on norm change, the article identifies '9/11' and the proclamation of the 'Global War on Terror' (GWoT) as a juncture of

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[4] We use the term 'trickle'/'trickling' to designate the multi-directional processes by which norms, or particular frames, proliferate and spread. Whereas the more common term 'diffusion' connotes top-down processes, the term of 'trickling' allows for a more multi-directional outlook which also includes attention to processes by which norms 'trickle up' (Wiener 2018: 24) or 'trickle across' different geographical scales or sites of activity.

normative turbulence leading not only to norm downsizing within the assumed liberal core of states but also introducing an era where a 'security first' logic is gradually trickling across different sites of international, regional and national policy and practice. As Buzan and Wæver (2009: 253) have shown with their concept of 'macro securitization', while security is commonly understood as multifaceted, contested and adjoined to various agendas, at certain points in time international security has become 'structured by one overarching conflict' and produced 'a higher order of securitization [which] embeds itself in such a way as to incorporate and align the more parochial securitizations beneath it' (ibid). The '"War on Terror" […] especially in its "long war" formulation' is one prominent example (ibid: 256), and of particular relevance for our analysis. As will be shown, this perspective of 'macro-securitization' that mobilises and aligns securitisations across other sites of international, regional and national practice captures key characteristics of the growing convergence that defines the turn to stabilisation in Africa.

Building on this conceptual groundwork, and combining it with insights gained from expert interviews with – as well as analysis of key policy documents by – international and African regional intervention actors,[5] we reassess the 'collaboration bias' (see above). Firstly, we convey how conflict is not per se negative or destabilising. In fact, contestations and conflict over the human rights agenda were integral elements of wider processes of norm proliferation and localisation (see also Krisch *et al.*, this issue) in the context of the emergence of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) during the post-Cold War period. Secondly, on the flip side, our analysis of the turn to stabilisation demonstrates that cooperation and convergence across IOs, as well as across Global North and Global South intervention actors, need not be normatively desirable. Rather, we show that while recent international–African collaboration and convergence on counterterrorism frames 'solves' the norm conflict between 'sovereignty' and 'intervention', it also involves the downsizing of human rights and democratisation norms.

III. Contested liberal interventionism in the post-Cold War era: Interface conflicts and norm proliferation

The rise of an 'African International Society' during the 1950s and 1960s was, in large part, 'a reaction against Western imperialism' (Williams 2006:

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[5] The article draws on a total of 54 interviews conducted during our field visits to Abuja (ECOWAS headquarters), Addis Ababa (AU headquarters), Bamako, New York (UN headquarters) and Washington during 2018 and 2019.

260). Accordingly, the peace and security agenda of the first African continental organisation, the OAU, established in 1963, was the liberation of African states from colonialism, which was 'in itself a human rights issue' (Nmehielle 2003: 418). As these struggles of national liberation were pursued within and through the UN, the post-World War II international human rights regime came to serve as a justificatory reference point for the quest for decolonialisation, thereby partly enhancing the resonance of human rights discourse with newly independent states. Meanwhile, to protect these states, the OAU institutionalised, as one of its pillars, the non-intervention norm, which coexisted rather uneasily with aspirations to protect human rights.

Accordingly, ambiguity and shifting contextual meanings from the outset shaped the human rights agenda as well as related matters of intervention, sovereignty, and the African–international relationship. Under the OAU 'non-intervention' prevailed in regard to internal matters of African regimes, and the organisation gained the reputation as a 'club of African Heads of States' ultimately mostly concerned with sovereignty and political power (Murithi 2008). Yet, the end of the Cold War marked the beginning of a period adding gradually more impetus to human rights and democratisation, relative to state rights.

The post-Cold War juncture

The end of the Cold War led to a renaissance of 'Kantian' liberal internationalist visions of global order, based on the spread of democracy, human rights, capitalism, and the strengthening of IOs (e.g. Russett and Oneal 2001). In turn, the related emphasis on international order, multilateralism and peace settlements, combined with the need for addressing the rise of new intra-state wars, opened up opportunities for the expansion of UN peacekeeping activities.

Interacting with these changes, the 1990s witnessed the strong advocacy of a number of African leaders – including the former presidents of South Africa, Senegal and Nigeria and former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who were influenced by experiences of African liberation movements and the spirit of Pan-Africanism. In advocating the need for greater African self-reliance, also in regard to addressing the proliferation of armed conflicts on the continent, they drew strongly upon wider human rights and democratisation discourses shaped by the liberal optimism of the post-Cold War years. Specifically, while emphasising the primacy of African solutions, this new generation of regional 'norm entrepreneurs' pushed for an acceptance of interventionism, including the use of force, and insisted – especially against the backdrop of the Rwandan genocide – that sovereignty should no longer be a shield against misconduct and human rights violations (Williams 2006).

On the sub-regional level, steps were taken to institutionalise these new norms when the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted a protocol relating to the 'Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping, and Security' in 1999. The document allowed for military interventions into member states in instances of violation against human rights, the rule of law or democratic principles. ECOWAS, through the multilateral force *Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group* (ECOMOG), had already taken a lead role in regional interventionism during the 1990s. Yet, these interventions were invariably *in support* of state leaders, thereby promoting African-led interventionism while avoiding any controversy regarding sovereignty matters. In this regard, the 1999 protocol has by norm scholars been described as a significant new development and an important 'contribution to a global script on how regional organisations can deal with inter and intrastate conflict' (Hartmann and Striebinger 2015: 75).

These developments were flanked by continental processes whereby the OAU issued the Sirte Declaration calling for the establishment of an African Union in 1999. The Lomé summits followed in 2000 and resulted in the adoption of the Constitutive Act of the African Union in 2001. This establishment of the AU is widely known as marking a continental organisational sea change from the 'non-intervention' paradigm of the OAU to a 'non-indifference' paradigm of the AU. The institutionalisation of the latter included Article 4h of the Constitutive Act, which established the right of the AU to intervene into the internal affairs of a member state, including through the use of force, in the event of 'grave circumstances: war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity'. This formed a new normative element within a broader set of efforts towards creating an APSA, aimed at providing comprehensive and collective continental responses to the multitude of peace, security and governance challenges. These efforts were supported by several international capacity-building mechanisms, such as the European Union's (EU) 'African Peace Facility' and the UN's 'Ten-Year Capacity Building Programme for the African Union'.

One of the early tests of this emerging architecture was the 2003 AU peacebuilding mission in Burundi (AMIB); the first operation 'wholly initiated, planned and executed by the AU members' (Murithi 2008: 75). AMIB showed modest success in contributing to demobilisation, protecting returning politicians, improving conditions for internally displaced people and refugees as well as enabling humanitarian access. These humanitarian aspects were seen as very much 'keeping with the AU and New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) policy frameworks that were subsequently developed' (ibid).

Normative frictions and interface conflicts

While the Constitutive Act and the PSC Protocol of the AU reflect new post-Cold War norm developments, including a commitment to international collaboration (in particularly with the UN), the documents also indicate 'normative hybridity' (Goodale 2007: 7) and profound frictions between pre-existing and newly emerging norms. Specifically, the AU founding documents adopted a proactive interventionist language, while including strong references to sovereignty, conjoined with norms of non-intervention (Article 4g), peaceful/political dispute settlement, the non-use of force (Article 4e, 4f and 4i), as well as subsidiarity norms that stress the primacy of regional solutions. The latter convey that the UN's supreme authority is not uncontested.

In practice, disagreement between national, regional and international actors has frequently occurred. Particularly over differing conceptions of the human rights agenda, selectivity, dominance of both the powerful states in the international system and of remaining influential autocrats within the AU, as well as over the imposing nature of liberal interventionism. Such frictions have escalated into interface conflicts in particular over questions of *when* sovereignty can be legitimately superseded in the context of military intervention, and *who is* in the position of making such decision.

In this regard, the post-Cold War redefinition of sovereignty norms along the lines of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) has been a key conflict trigger. At the UN level, the R2P co-evolved with the creation of the AU. In turn, ideas underpinning the R2P, find certain 'correspondences in the cosmopolitan and communitarian ethics embedded in traditional social orders observable across Africa' (Hunt 2018: 155), and reached new momentum with the AU's emphasis on 'non-indifference'. Accordingly, the objectives of R2P were incorporated into the AU charter. Yet, despite this apparent norm institutionalisation, the coercive element of the R2P proved highly contentious with the 'inherently complex structure' of the norm leaving substantial room for differing interpretations of its application (Garwood-Gowers 2015: 1). The R2P's three-pillar approach assigns states the primary responsibility to protect their citizens from war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and ethnic cleansing (pillar I). Only if this responsibility has not been acted out, and when peaceful means and capacity building to enable domestic protection (pillar II) have failed, is the responsibility transferred to the international community, permitting it to use force as an instrument of *last resort* (pillar III). Thereby, the R2P combines competing norms. It can, as such, be understood as a composite norm, or an 'organising principle', representing a shared recognition of an issue, and the commitment to engage in further deliberation about norm implementation under specific circumstances.

An illustrative example of conflict occurring over implementation, and the scope of the coercive element of the protection agenda, is the case of intervention in Darfur during the mid-2000s (2004–2007), unfolding in parallel to the emergence of the R2P (for details, see Gelot 2012).

In 2004 a few months after the AU had deployed a peacekeeping mission (AMIS) in response to the escalating conflict in Darfur, the US announced that a genocide had occurred in the region, implying that the 'just cause' threshold for military intervention was met, and prompting the UN to launch a Commission of Inquiry on the matter.

A number of African state leaders, including the then incumbent chair of the AU, responded by launching an 'African mini-summit' on Darfur. The summit declaration indicates the activation of a norm conflict, as it 'expressly rejected any foreign (that is, UN or "Western") intervention by any country whatsoever in this purely African issue' (declaration quoted in Bellamy 2006: 160). Instead, it emphasised a commitment to preserve Sudanese sovereignty and pursue a negotiated solution.

These contestations, however, were not unfolding along the lines of a clear 'interface' between opposing international and regional rationalities. Rather they involved contextual strategising and shifting positions. For example, the AU did not reject the R2P as such. It did, moreover, declare serious concerns about the humanitarian crisis in Darfur and strongly condemned the Sudanese government's violation of the ceasefire agreement. Additionally, the unwillingness to invoke Article 4h – as well as the later alignment with a UN approach (see below) – must be seen in the light of deep scepticism toward the then emergent US doctrine of unilateral preventive war. The UN, in turn, has been criticised for seeking to write off responsibility and cover up for a lack of political will to act. This was because the US, the U.K., Germany, Chile and Spain – i.e. the member states known as supportive of action against Sudan – during a UNSC deliberation on Darfur, sought to broker an agreement, that confirmed the need to protect civilians in Darfur, but deferred the protection-responsibility to the AU (Bellamy 2006). This was notwithstanding the fact that AMIS had nowhere near the resources nor the willingness to meaningfully implement a robust protection mandate (ibid).

Thereby, disagreements over *what* should be done were accompanied by conflicting perspectives on *who* should take the lead. Subsequent attempted transferrals of responsibility from the UN to the AU, the US took the lead in pushing for replacing AMIS with a UN force. This proposition that a UN force would 'do a better job' and the resulting relegation of AMIS as the 'second-best option' demoralised its troops and compromised the integrity of the ongoing peace negotiations at a critical point (de Waal 2007: 1042, 1045). After protracted hesitation on the part of the UN, during which the

Khartoum government entrenched its position against international intervention, blaming it to be an attempt of 'recolonization', the UNSC (with abstentions from China, Qatar and Russia) adopted Resolution 1706 in 2006, which 'invited for Sudan's consent to a UN force, implying that if such consent was not forthcoming, such a force might be dispatched without it' (ibid: 1042). Sudanese president Omar Al-Bashir rejected the resolution, and a compromise was only found with the subsequent establishment of a hybrid AU–UN mission in 2007.

The inertia in regard to finding common ground on ending the violence and increasing the protection of the population in Darfur has been widely criticised. This includes critiques of how the discourse of 'humanitarian intervention' produces 'wildly inflated expectations' of what the interventionary use of force can achieve in terms of protection (de Waal 2007: 1043), as well as of the AU's unwillingness to act against the consent of Khartoum, and the resulting 'mission impossible' facing AMIS personnel (Badescu and Bergholm 2009: 297–8).

Overall, the case illustrates how the complex and partly internally contradictive set of norms that set the parameters for what constitutes 'justified' use of force – especially in the context of 'humanitarian intervention' – have been prone to trigger norm-related conflicts involving national, regional and international actors with competing claims to authority.

Yet, the contentiousness of the R2P did not result in the repudiation of protection norms on the part of the AU. In fact, as the following discussion will show, the Darfur case bears upon wider responses that convey contestation as an integral element of norm localisation and of ongoing international–regional deliberation.

Responses to conflict: Tracing the contested nature of norm proliferation

The 2005 'Ezulwini Process', where the AU's executive council gathered to formulate a 'common position' on UN–AU relations, took place while the conflict over the means (and leadership) of an intervention in Darfur was at its peak. The latter shaped the Ezulwini process, while the development as such reflects a generic attempt of the AU to respond to wider normative frictions over the use of force shaping the evolving forms of African–international collaboration.

In effect, the response offered by the 'Ezulwini Consensus' outcome document, confirmed the importance of the partnership with the UN, endorsed the R2P in two paragraphs, while proceeding to note that this should not be taken as 'a pretext to undermine the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of states' (African Union Executive Council

2005, section B(i)). Moreover, the document stressed that the use of force, more generally, should only be permitted with reference to the UN Charter Article 51 (the right to self-defence) or to Article 4(h) of the AU Constitutive Act (ibid). This 'implies that the [UN Security C]ouncil's right to authorize armed intervention in Africa should be circumscribed' (Bellamy 2006: 161). Such reasoning was coupled to recommendations to reform the UNSC, as its authority to sanction interventions was seen as lacking legitimacy as long as the council would not be more inclusive – including African permanent members.

While the Ezulwini Consensus is often perceived as an important step towards creating an inclusive international consensus on the emerging R2P norm, other interpretations emphasise its function of counterbalancing Western hegemony by insisting that regional bodies 'make the call' on interventions and noting that sovereignty considerations might take precedence in certain cases (Bellamy 2006). Both perspectives hold relevance, as the African efforts to circumscribe the coercive elements associated with the R2P can be understood as *part of* 'norm localization' efforts aimed at encouraging acceptance of such norms, including by decreasing the R2P's potential to condone neo-colonial practice (see also Williams 2006).

Such ongoing contestations and pruning of norms, whereby newly emerging norms are adjusted to become compatible with existing beliefs and practices (Acharaya 2004: 250) – and, also, to avoid their rejection by African state elites – have shaped the broader normative evolution of the AU as well as the advancement of the regional–international partnership. Accordingly AU serves as a 'regional filter' (Dembinski and Schott 2014) for norm proliferation, by offering an entry point for deliberation between national, regional and international 'normative structures of meaning-in-use' (Milliken 1999: 231). As a seasoned UN human rights officer noted, the establishment of the AU and the growing role of ECOWAS offered crucial new institutional fora for regional–international exchange on issues including security policies, human rights and protection matters, which previously often received only scant attention or were discussed 'secretly between the heads of states […]. So, they [AU and ECOWAS] managed to create a public forum where these things are discussed but also where the international community expects [...] that these discussions are happening' (interview, Bamako, 31 October 2018).

While such discussions frequently have been tense, these tensions, including related norm contestations, have been integral to wider institutional developments toward comprehensive collective security approaches. The latter have drawn considerably on – as well as reconfigured and contributed to – international discourses on protection, human rights, democratic governance and the significance of inter-organisational partnerships.

In this regard the founding of the AU marked a constitutive moment, initiating the (ongoing) formation of the APSA as a generic response to security, governance, protection as well as human rights challenges, and to the conflicts and collaborations with international actors on these challenges. This process can be traced from the Constitutive Act, to the African Union Peace and Security Council, the Panel of the Wise, and the African Standby Force – which adopts the R2P in its deployment scenarios – and to the recent aspirational *Agenda 2063* and *Silencing the Guns*. Not only have these developments added up to a 'huge increase in the AU's conflict management activities compared to its predecessor' (Williams and Boutellis 2014: 255). They furthermore indicated first small steps – which showed 'just enough success to give […] hope' (de Waal 2012) – toward the building up of a continental institutional architecture necessary for ensuring that aspirational and fundamental rights can be protected.

However, the AU was born at a normatively turbulent juncture. While the liberal transformative ambitions and the increased impetus of human rights and democratisation discourses in the 1990s – the heyday of liberal interventionism – were shaping intervention discourses at the time when the AU was founded, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 2001 marked the beginning of a period during which counterterrorism agendas gradually started to reshape the global normative context. In the next section we unpack how these wider gradual transformations translate into a reframing of intervention as stabilisation, which 'solves' the tension between intervention and sovereignty norms by catering for interests of state elites, but, as a result, also reframes, and limits the scope of, human rights and democratisation norms.

IV. Intervention as stabilisation in the post-'9/11' era: Division of labour and norm-downsizing

With growing concerns over violent extremism and 'jihadism' and its perceived convergence with migration, organised crime and unemployment during the 2000s, Africa came to occupy an increasingly central position on Western security agendas. The early 2000s witnessed a low-key extension of the GWoT on the continent, generating new strategic partnerships, in particular between African actors and the US. From the late 2000s and during the 2010s counterterrorism-inspired stabilisation expanded substantially, involving new lead-functions for African regional organisations, illustrated for example by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM, established in 2007), as well as new and ambiguous roles for the UN. In particular, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA, established in 2013), which saw the UN

taking on a stabilisation mandate in a context shaped by ongoing international and regional efforts to counter terrorism has sparked intense debate over what role the UN is and should be playing, in the context of complex conflict scenarios. Analyses have raised concerns over the increasingly blurred lines between peacekeeping and counterterrorism (Charbonneau 2017); criticised the down prioritisation of 'good governance' (Karlsrud 2019b: 81) and the subjugation of protection agendas to stabilisation goals; pointed to the related negative effects on human rights and human security (Di Razza 2018); and noted a partial shift away from foundational UN norms of minimal use of force and impartiality (Bellamy and Hunt 2015). MINUSMA has accordingly been understood as indicating a 'turning point' for UN interventions (Isbrekken 2017), with possible implications for the UN's legitimacy and wider engagements in conflict zones. While the case paradigmatically illustrates recent trends and related paradoxes, it can also be understood as one of the contemporary instalments of a longer trajectory of post-9/11 gradual global norm change, whereby the discourse of state security has taken centre stage, at the expense of human rights and democratisation norms.

The '9/11' critical juncture

While human rights norms have always been subject to contestations (Liese 2009: 24), 9/11 has been identified as a 'watershed moment' (Wiener 2018: 150) in regard to triggering normative transformations that took these contestations to 'to a new level' (Dunne 2007: 269). A particular relevant example for our analysis is the process by which the different notions of 'failed states' entered post-9/11 terminology. Specifically, the term came to form a central element in the strategy of the George W. Bush administration of justifying the downsizing of core human rights norms, pertaining to the rights of citizens, irregular combatants and confinement practices in the GWoT, where the main adversaries were not regular soldiers but insurgents and terrorists. As Wiener (2018: 150) has shown, this strategy of (reverse) norm innovation (Wiener 2018: 150) can be traced back to the initiatives of then-Assistant Attorney General Jay S. Bybee, who justified 'coercive interrogations' of (alleged) Al-Qaeda prisoners. Amongst other things, Bybee argued in a 2002 memorandum that US treaty obligations can be suspended in dealings with 'failed states', thereby opening the door for the dismantling of the universal status of human rights since, according to this logic, 'failed states' are distinguished from 'liberal states' whose obligations under international law are restricted to other 'liberal states' (Wiener 2018: 169). This meant that alleged Al-Qaeda prisoners were denied Prisoners of War status and redefined as 'unlawful combatants'. More widely, the development has

been interpreted as a global critical juncture offering the opportunity to 're-evaluate the relationships between human rights and national security' (Dunne 2007: 276).

In turn, the protection of 'liberal' states' national security, was increasingly understood as conditioned upon *fixing* 'failed states', as the latters' weak capacity to govern turned them into suspected breeding grounds for growing transnational 'Islamic extremism'. This perceived threat scenario was captured in the 2002 US National Security Strategy's (2002: 1) judgment that: 'America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones.'

The Bush administration initially integrated democracy promotion into its strategy to stabilise 'failed states', combining a military approach with institution building and reconstruction projects. However, during the 2000s the failures, inherent contradictions and high costs associated with this approach of coercive liberal peace- and order-making became difficult to ignore, especially during the course of developments following the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Accordingly, during the Obama presidency, the US shifted from an approach of 'overreach' in Iraq (Karlsrud 2019a: 10) to a pragmatic approach (Moe 2018; Moe and Stepputat 2018) based on supporting authoritarian elites and local militaries as well as deploying special operations and conducting targetted killings.

In turn, the so-called 'migrant crisis' in 2015, added momentum in regard to growing European support for the stabilisation paradigm, according to a logic of pragmatic containment rather than human rights and democracy promotion. The crux of this pragmatic approach – and its underlying reasoning that 'different rules' apply to 'different states' – is captured by two influential figures of the American security establishment, who, in a 2016 Council of Foreign Relations' report, declared that while 'the United States can live with undemocratic states', the US 'cannot live with ungoverned spaces […] which inevitably become a breeding ground for and exporters of terrorism, criminal networks, disease, refugees, and other problems' (Boot and Miklaucic 2016). Accordingly, they continue, 'governance' is 'most important' in comparison to democracy and human rights, which implies that international interventions and organisations should 'focus on building governments, not democracies, in chaotic foreign countries' (ibid). Exhibiting 'strong elements of existing order universalism – all states against non-state terrorists, order against chaos' (Buzan and Wæver 2009: 265) – this statement captures an emerging global consensus on downsizing democratisation and human rights norms while simultaneously strengthening states in the name of stabilisation (Moe and Müller 2018).

Such consensus has become increasingly discernible in intervention strategies across Africa (see also Karlsrud 2019a, 2019b). This includes the much

debated mission in Mali, interventions in the Sahel more widely, and missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (in particular since 2013), the Central African Republic (CAR) and Somalia, where Western intervention actors collaborate with governments and regional counterparts with the aim of assisting them to combat, and regain territory from, armed non-state contenders.

This reframing of intervention as pragmatic stabilisation, and the related changing intervention practices convey, as will be discussed next, the effects of post-9/11 macro securitisation, incorporating and mobilising lower scales of securitisation across geographical and professional sites.

Macro securitisation trickling across international and regional sites

In the realm of foreign and defence policy, the GWoT generated a dominant macro security frame[6] that enabled coordination between the US and leading states within the European Union. Moreover, it allowed these Western powers to form a range of new alliances, including with Saudi Arabia, China and Russia, and to activate action at the sites of international and regional organisations.

The UN has occupied an ambiguous position in these processes; being an organisation of critical importance for the legitimation of interventions, while embodying institutional norms that sit uneasy with the promotion of counterterrorism and stabilisation frameworks. This has led to frictions *within* the UN's normative structure. In this regard, the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations report (United Nations 2015) has been understood to demonstrate a 'push back' from the UN peace bureaucracy 'against the militarization of UN peacekeeping' (Andersen 2018: 343). The report confirmed the UN's long-standing position that 'United Nations troops should not undertake military counterterrorism operations' and noted that '[e]xtreme caution should guide the mandating of enforcement tasks to degrade, neutralise or defeat a designated enemy' (United Nations 2015: x). However, while consensus regarding the UN's unsuitability for undertaking full-blown counterterrorism operations remains, recent debates on how to reform the UN in order to make it more 'relevant to future needs of its member states' – i.e. needs of addressing migration, transnational extremism and organised crime issues – have been marked by a significant 'discursive turn towards stabilization, counterinsurgency and counterterrorism' (Karlsrud 2019b: 73). Especially the UNSC's 'three penholders' (Karlsrud 2019a: 10) – France, the UK and the US – have, since the 2010s, pushed for

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[6] 'Security frame' here refers to a scheme of interpretation and meaning assignment that serves to transform subjects into issues of 'security' and 'threats', and mobilis action according to this framing.

integrating each of their stabilisation concepts into UNSC resolutions (see also Curran and Holtom 2015). This development has translated into deviations from the UN norm of minimal use of force as evidenced for example by MONUSCO's mandate to 'neutralize' rebel groups, or MINUSMA's mandate to help regaining territorial control by force, as well as the associated enhanced cooperation and intelligence sharing between MINUSMA and the G5 Sahel regional counter-terrorism force (Karlsrud 2019b; Charbonneau 2017).

These developments align with calls for change by representatives of the 'operational UN'. Particularly in the context of MINUSMA, both African and Western member states have called for a departure from UN norms of impartiality to allow greater leverage in regard to addressing terrorist-associated threats (Karlsrud 2019a: 73). The securitisation of the UN discourse and practice, as well as the related normative transformations, thereby unfold as synergetic 'top down' and 'bottom up' processes.[7] In fact, 'on the ground' 'exceptional threat conditions', have become a significant reference point for 'justifying exceptional actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure' (Buzan *et al.* 1998: 23–4). A 2017 UN-commissioned report (Dos Santos *et al.* 2017) on how to optimise operations and protect mission staff in 'high security-risk' contexts is illustrative of this. The report is lead-authored by Lieutenant General Carlos Alberto dos Santos, who served from 2007 to 2009 as Force Commander in the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), and in 2013–2015 as Force Commander of MONUSCO. The report draws on this practitioner 'expertise' to justify its views, which differ significantly from those of the HIPPO: 'Unfortunately, hostile forces do not understand a language other than force', it notes, and recommends that the UN 'should provide an updated interpretation of [its] basic principles' so the latter would not be 'restrictions on the initiative and the use of force'. In fact, it argues, the UN needs to use force *proactively*: 'Missions should go where the threat is, in order to neutralize it' (Dos Santos *et al.* 2017: 5). While parts of the report have raised critique from UN diplomatic staff, it has been taken up by operational staff across contemporary 'high risk' UN missions in CAR, Mali, DRC, South Sudan and Darfur, to help informing operational strategy development.[8]

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[7] Another example in this regard is that a portion of MINUSMA's personnel are veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan interventions and are thereby professionally socialised with the practices, beliefs and organisational cultures underpinning stabilisation operations (interview, military expert/diplomatic mission, Bamako, 11 January 2018).

[8] The Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support (DPKO-DFS) *Back to Office Report* on 'Improving Security of Peacekeepers – DOS SANTOS CRUZ REPORT (DSCR), Second Implementation Workshop at RSCE 12–14 October 2018'.

Taken together, these shifts, while not forecasting the coming of 'full-blown' UN counterterrorism operations, do indicate significant trajectories of securitisation of – and related normative turbulences within – the UN.

The incorporation of lower scales of securitisation into the wider post-9/11 security frame, also centrally includes African regional organisations and governments. The promotion of 'African solutions' by Western states and organisations forms a key element of the legitimation of stabilisation-driven interventions, as they are informed by a reprioritisation from Western-led missions to the empowerment of so-called 'host' forces. Particularly US efforts – but also European engagements, such as the EU's Training Missions (EUTM), for example – emphasise the need to 'work hand-in-hand with […] African counterparts to increase military capacity in countries threatened by terrorism' (The White House 2014).

In turn, the associated rise of externally provided resources has stimulated the adoption of stabilisation logics by regional and national African elites. Moreover, the overlap between, on the one hand, an international stabilisation logic that casts 'non-state actors' as the main security concern, and, on the other, the self-interests of a number of influential African regional and state elites in consolidating power and territorial control, has further enabled securitisation at the regional scale.

Pragmatic consensus and division of work

The above-analysed processes of macro securitisation that mobilise, and converge with, securitisations across other geographical scales and sites of practice, mirror dynamics of norm proliferation, explored in the previous section, to the extent that both processes involve the trickling across sites of certain frames and justificatory frameworks.

What is, in turn, from the vantage point of this article a noteworthy difference, is that whereas historically, interventionary use of force in liberal interventionism tended to trigger norm-related interface conflicts, in contrast, within the context of contemporary stabilisation missions, the use of force in interventions is instead marked by intensified collaboration. This conveys a 'growing convergence between African and international actors around a reworked "intervention as stabilization" regime' (Soares de Oliveira and Verhoeven 2018: 8, 19).

Such convergence has translated into a 'symbiotic division of work' (de Coning 2017: 154), structured by a logic whereby regional African actors take on 'first responder' enforcement activities, whereas the UN (ideally) takes over when there is a peace to keep and/or engage in parallel stabilisation tasks. Contemporary missions convey different configurations of such a division of work. These range from, for example, the AU-led

AMISOM that fights against al-Shabaab under an UN mandate, supported by the UN Support Office for AMISOM and with funding from EU, to the direct integration of an African-led Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) into the UN mission in the DRC, as well as the 'division of work' in Mali where the G5 Sahel force – an ad hoc military coalition of African states – supported by the French Barkhane operation, carry out counterterrorism operations while MINUSMA simultaneously seeks to 'stabilise' (in turn, the latter de facto involves increasing logistical support to counterterrorism, in particular through the G5 Sahel force).

To clarify, inter-organisational conflicts still frequently occur in stabilisation missions. Yet, the content of conflicts tends to concern practical, functional and resourcing matters, not diverging norms or positional differences in regard to the justification of the use of force.

This shift from norm-related interface conflicts to pragmatic consensus among African and external actors in regard to the interventionary use of force may be partly explained by the pressures as well as newly emerging opportunities facing these sets of actors within the context of wider normative change. First, in a reconfigured global normative context where the UN struggles to both delimit and 'update' its roles to new 'exceptional threat scenarios', the mobilisation of African actors through strategic partnerships offers a 'solution' to this struggle (interviews, AU officials, the Peace and Security Department, Addis Ababa (9 June 2018); UN official, DPO, New York (13 March 2019). As de Waal (2015: 189) puts it, the UN has a set of principles that determine peacekeeping operations that can only be worked around with difficulties, including reluctance to deploy troops from one country in a neighbouring country, restrictions on rules of engagements, and onerous political and human rights reporting requirements. These constraints became a problem as the US sought to merge peacekeeping and counterterrorism [...]. By comparison, African countries contributing troops through the AU, ECOWAS and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) are more flexible on the political purpose and mandate [… and] more ready to take casualties.

Against this backdrop the 'division of work', commonly justified with reference to the established principle of subsidiarity,[9] corresponds to what Pratt (2018) terms *deference*, whereby one IO selectively confers authority to another IO or actor, so as to mitigate a rule conflict or a normative tension. In the present case, deference helps the UN to mitigate a tension *within* its own normative structure, and allows for 'transferring risks', as

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[9] This legal principle governs the relation between the UN, the AU and the RECs, according to the idea that central authority should play a secondary role, only taking on tasks that cannot be performed at a more local level.

well as 'some of the dirty work', to African actors (interviews, UNOCHA executive, Bamako (28 January 2018); UN official, DPO, New York (13 March 2019)). In turn, such deference offers African elites prominent roles as 'strategic partners'. Moreover, whereas post-Cold War interventions were often conflicting with norms of sovereignty, stabilisation interventions, on the contrary, offer opportunities for African elites pursuing agendas of regaining territory from non-state opponents and thereby reasserting or remaking sovereignty (Engel 2018; Moe 2017). As such, the reconceptualisation of intervention as stabilisation – and the agency of African elites to make use of this shift (Soares de Oliveira and Verhoeven 2018) – have inverted the relationship between intervention and sovereignty, as the latter is increasingly pursued and 'produced through the *presence* of, rather than the *barring* of, external interveners' (Moe 2017: 122, emphasis added).

Thereby, the turn to stabilisation has reduced previously prevalent norm conflicts in the interfaces of African and international actors. It has also, however, reset the parameters for interventions, in ways that limit the scope for prioritising the promotion of human rights and democratisation norms.

Norm downsizing in intervention practices

To be sure, human rights, human security and democratisation norms as such remain stable, also within the frameworks of contemporary UN and AU stabilisation missions. The protection of civilians and of human rights are part of most, if not all, contemporary AU and UN mission mandates, and the UN works under a Human Rights Due Diligence Policy formulated to prevent collaboration with abusive elements of allied armed forces. Also, support to 'good governance' remains an element of stabilisation frameworks. Yet, in zooming in on the actual practices of intervention, a growing amount of empirically informed research is pointing out that the turn to stabilisation has significantly limited the scope for implementation of these norms. This is the case in particular because stabilisation, and related counterterrorism efforts, squarely side with the interests and powers of states, often repressive ones – if variably fragmented or 'fragile' – and rely on the coercive capacities of these states; be it the growing assistance to 'host governments' defence sectors, or the reliance on military ad hoc coalitions – based on alliances of 'willing' states with vested geopolitical interests – such as the G5 Sahel force.

According to Reeve and Pelter (2014: 27), 'across the Sahel-Sahara' international stabilisation and counterterrorism efforts are 'dependent on maintaining relationships and status of forces agreements with national governments' which 'has strengthened a number of non-democratic

regimes'. In turn, this makes them 'largely immune from pressure to improve their repressive treatment of citizens and political opponents' (see also Karlsrud 2019a: 14).

Along similar lines, and with a specific focus on implications for the UN, Hunt (2017: 122) warns that the organisation's increasing alignment with governments and their security forces, may over time involve a 'high price' to be paid for the UN's human rights architecture when and if 'the very governments the UN relies upon for access and action become abusive and/or threaten to withdraw consent'.

Resonating with this warning, examples cited in our research in regard to the behaviours of the 'host governments' supported through the UN missions MONUSCO and MINUSMA as well as through the regional G5 Sahel force, include instances of government forces arming 'allied' civilian groups against 'enemy' civilian groups, or directly targeting civilians – allegedly as part of their stabilisation and counterterrorism efforts – as well as security and intelligence officials using counterterrorism legislation to obstruct investigations into human rights abuses (interviews Bamako, Human Rights analyst (29 October 2018); civilian MINUSMA staff members (31 October 2018); former MONUSCO staff member, Copenhagen, (24 February 2018); see also the African Commission on Human and People Rights 2017).

As a human rights analyst noted (interview, Bamako, 29 October 2018), critiquing the unwavering international and regional (French, UN, EU and the G5 Sahel force) support granted the Malian forces despite such abuses:

> In the last few years they [...] identified mass graves and killings and so on, and yet the army security forces are still the main recipients of funding, equipment, training in combat and so forth [...] You blindly side with a government that sponsors or allows or doesn't have the capacity to prevent abuses and you contribute politically, financially ....

While UN mandates commonly include provisions to confront abuses by allied governments, our findings align with Hunt's (2017: 121) observation that the deepening international alignment with host governments makes reporting on human rights abuses particularly 'politically sensitive'. In this vein, and challenging the view of the UN as the international human rights 'watchdog', a former UN staff reflecting on his work with MONUSCO observed (telephone interview, 20 December 2018):

> There is now a tension between the human rights department and the political department, because if the human rights people look at something that involves the [Congolese] government, the government will say 'stop' and then the political department has to deal with the fall out [...] The

> political department does not really want the results [of investigations of human rights abuses] because it complicates their work.

Furthermore, the increasing emphasis on state-centred stabilisation, has resulted in contemporary UN and AU missions – and related regional ad hoc coalition initiatives – being increasingly ill-fitted to address the root causes of the given conflicts; such as absent, undemocratic or abusive governments, lack of human security and development, and inter-communal conflicts over resources and land (Charbonneau 2017; Karlsrud 2019a). By focusing narrowly on strengthening the defence sector, stabilisation and counterterrorism interventions may in fact exacerbate these problems. Considerable concern in regard to this predicament is discernible among senior officials at the headquarter level of both the UN and AU. This is the case in particular because one evident and shared organisational 'lesson' in regard to interventions into contemporary conflicts – with for example Somalia serving as a key illustrative case, where the AU and the UN have had a long-standing engagement – is that they are not solvable through military means (interviews, AU official/former senior officer to AMISOM, the Peace and Security Department, Addis Ababa, 30 August 2018; UN Official, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, New York, 13 March 2019).

Yet, current intervention practices, far from being informed by 'organisational lessons' on how to foster lasting peace, are instead shaped by organisational (UN and AU) attempts to *adapt* to wider normative and strategic shifts, promoted by influential member states (Western and African), for whom the UN, the AU and the regional ad hoc coalitions are 'tools' for pursuing their self-interest (be it counterterrorism, border control, prevention of migration, or the securing of territory) (on UN as a 'proxy tool', see Karlsrud 2019b: 81).

The related effects on the outcomes and practices of intervention, indicate both the legitimacy costs this may over time involve for the UN, and the accompanying ongoing redirection of APSA, away from emerging (if always contested) ideals of collective and holistic security – discussed in the first part of this article – toward a (re)prioritisation centred on empowering states in providing narrowly military and sovereignty-boosting responses.

V. Concluding reflection

This article has contributed an empirically grounded perspective to the debate on how changes in the 'normative context' on the macro scale of the global order interact with micro-level practices of intervention and related justifications of the use of force.

Tracing such interactions across the post-Cold War era and the post-9/11 era, respectively, we have identified a gradual shift from a pattern of *contested norm proliferation* in regard to human rights and democratisation norms toward a more recently emerging pattern of *pragmatic consensus on norm downsizing*.

Specifically, the latter pattern which involves the reframing of intervention as stabilisation appears to have all but solved the previously prevalent interface conflicts and normative frictions characterising post-Cold War liberal interventionism (and in particular the use of force in 'humanitarian interventions'). This could be read as an indication that the current paradigm, centred on 'stabilising', marks somewhat of a counter project to liberal interventionism and its transformative yet arguably imposing agendas. Along these lines, one might ask whether counterterrorism itself is in the process of becoming a 'new norm' (resetting the parameters for 'acceptable' behaviour across national, regional and global sites). If so, our analysis of the effects on intervention practices concur with the view that this would constitute an instance of 'bad norm development' (Heller and Kahl 2013), in so far as elite convergence on such 'new norm' across national, regional and international scales, limit the scope of human and democratic rights of populations vis-à-vis 'state rights' and state security.

Acknowledgements

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