

## **Towards New African Security: A Prospective Role of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)\***

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The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a flagship project of the African Union under Agenda 2063. Although the AfCFTA appears to be an economic issue on the surface, it is in essence a security agenda. Through the lens of the securitization framework, this article explores why the AfCFTA needs to be explained in a wider context of the nexus between security and the economy. After illustrating the traits of the security–economy nexus of Africa, the analysis incorporates security discourses in relation to the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), both of which demonstrate the continent-wide importance of the linkage between security and the economy. Despite RECs and APSA being core components of the structuring of African security, however, this article notes that they have fallen short of changing the basic structure of a security discourse that has been state-driven. Against this background, in highlighting the potential of the AfCFTA as a new strategic approach that enhances the discursive space for civil societies, a case is made for labeling non-elite social strata as security actors.

**Keywords:** African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Regional Economic Communities (RECs), African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), security actors, referent objects

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## Introduction

Security and the economy are inextricably linked. Although this statement may sound somewhat contemporary in the context of the discipline of Security Studies, where state-centered militarism used to be the *sine qua non*,<sup>1</sup> the relationship between the two can be traced back to John Locke, who delimited the boundaries of government to the role of securing individual property rights. This relationship is particularly true for Africa, where the security motives which inspire political elites to do what they do are generally related to the control of economic resources as well as preserving incumbent power structures. While there continued to be systematic exploitation and degradation in the civic aspect of African public life,<sup>2</sup> the Organization of African Unity (OAU) also proved to be a political burden as it “degenerated into a club for African presidents to band together.”<sup>3</sup> At the same time, however, the failure of the OAU gave African leaders renewed impetus for reinvigorating an “African way of doing things.”<sup>4</sup>

The transformation process culminated in 2002 with the founding of the African Union (AU). As described in the *New African Initiative* in 2001,<sup>5</sup> the AU was not only about establishing a peace and security agenda, but also about political and economic integration, sustainable development, and societal renaissance. The ethos of the millennium African renaissance has been officially enshrined in the Constitutive Act of the AU (hereafter referred to as the Constitutive Act). According to Article 3 of the Constitutive Act, accelerating the “political and socio-economic integration of the continent” is the third highest priority out of 14 objectives and is preceded only by the two most fundamental objectives—with one being achieving unity and solidarity between the African countries, and the other being defending their sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence—which themselves are the AU’s *raison d’être*.<sup>6</sup>

Viewed in this light, any observation about the security issues in Africa requires the consideration of the relationship between security and the economy. In this regard, this study gives particular attention to two concepts. The first concept is the framework of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs).<sup>7</sup> The fact that the RECs have been at the forefront of advancing peace and security issues in the continent demonstrates that analyzing African issues within the context of the security–economy nexus is essential. As a second approach, this study explores the concept of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), an Africa-wide trade deal that commenced as of 1 January 2021. The AfCFTA consists of the eight RECs as the officially recognized building trade blocs. Given the significance of the RECs in peace and security issues, the establishment of the AfCFTA is expected to influence the formation of security discourse in the region.

Before proceeding further, one caveat is necessary. This is an article focusing on the discursive condition and conceptual potential of the AfCFTA in the African context while delineating ways in which pertinent discourses have evolved and changed. Therefore, it does not represent all strands of discussion regarding the relationships

between security and the economy, nor is it an attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of a free trade deal.

The rest of this article proceeds in four sections. The first section reviews the security–economy nexus of Africa alongside the conceptual and theoretical framework. The second focuses on the way African security issues have been dealt with in the context of the RECs. In the process, the role of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) will be highlighted as it is directly responsible for security-related issues, with the RECs being a physical medium for security implementation. The third section illustrates the future role of the AfCFTA, through the lens of the stated goals, aspirations, and implications of the deal, thereby presenting a possibility of restructuring the security discourse in Africa. To conclude, the fourth section summarizes the lessons observed from the previous sections.

### Security–Economy Nexus

As noted earlier, the relationship between security and the economy has long been embedded in the Lockean proviso, before the disciplines of International Relations and Security Studies (as a sub-discipline of International Relations) turned their attention to the dynamics of changing relations.<sup>8</sup> Albeit with some criticism that Locke's *Second Treatise* was presented in the justification of a bourgeois state,<sup>9</sup> the proviso at the same time emphasizes that governments can be replaced with new governments if they fail to protect individual property rights. Moreover, it also states that people “have the right to some property if [...] there is enough and as good left for others.”<sup>10</sup> In sum, Locke's political philosophy laid the foundation for the security–economy nexus by highlighting the relationship between two agents: the *trustors* who “retain the [property; economic] right to resist and reject government” and the *trustees* who could be discharged in the event they lose their credibility with the trustors on the issue of security.<sup>11</sup>

The current literature on the relationship between security and the economy has revolved on the trade–conflict nexus along with the effect of regional integration.<sup>12</sup> This trend should come as no surprise, given that international trade has become increasingly important in a global system. Vinod K. Aggarwal and Kristi Govella delineate various levels of linkage between trade and security by examining the traits of each trade bloc's relationship with security. For instance, non-trade issues have been an important part of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). In the cases of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), traditional security concerns were critical to their foundation.<sup>13</sup>

The linking of the economy to security is underpinned by trade policy, specifically in the form of a free trade agreement (FTA). Among others, bilateral accords in East

Asia have so far been conspicuous. Through an FTA with ASEAN, China had made attempts to mitigate the perceived sense of a “China Threat.” Japan’s initiations to support FTAs with ASEAN and Australia were intended to balance against China’s rise. Some claim that South Korea has “securitized” FTAs. For example, the Korea–U.S. FTA, in particular, has been perceived as an outgrowth of a combination of economic benefits and strategic interests.<sup>14</sup> For Seoul, the FTA with the United States is the “key to the survival [...] that is sandwiched between China and Japan.”<sup>15</sup>

Of course, the regional security dynamics in Africa are different from those in Asia. The economy of Africa is undiversified. Except for those who operate inside the state apparatus, most people are excluded and denied access to major resources. Given this context, the idea of fostering a diversified and broad-based productive economy is not an urgent option for political elites already established within the existing political system, which is exploitative in nature. Clientelism, a patronage system which pervaded the power structures of post-colonial African leaders, has long been practiced in obtaining and sustaining political support. Rent-seeking behavior has emerged alongside clientelism and become prevalent. Above all, it is the state resources—with their opportunities for economic gain—that have been at the center of these neopatrimonial practices.<sup>16</sup>

With all this in mind, for a conceptual and theoretical framework for analysis, this article draws on a combination of the concept of *extractive/inclusive institutions* and *securitization*. According to Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, in the sphere of political extractive institutions, decision-making power is concentrated “in the hands of a narrow elite” and “economic institutions are then often structured by this elite to extract resources from the rest of the society.”<sup>17</sup> In a related vein, inclusive economic institutions can be “forged on foundations laid by inclusive political institutions, which make power broadly distributed in society.”<sup>18</sup> Viewed in this terminology, despite some progress towards equal rights and economic growth in recent decades, as noted above, the African continent—in which the majority of leaders are semi-democratic—still largely remains based in extractive institutions.

Related to this point is the identification of the units of analysis: *agents* who constitute the condition of either extractive or inclusive institutions, on the one hand, and the values that are being claimed by the agents, on the other hand. In this respect, this article draws attention to securitization theory that offers the units of security analysis (*security actors* and *referent objects*), which can be used as a common thread in explaining the nexus between security and the economy. Security actors refer to those who design and utter what constitutes a security issue. Common players in this role exist within the realm of the elite social strata, such as political leaders and governing bureaucracies. In the case of Africa, as noted above, those operating within the inner circle of clientelism might well be the security actors. Referent objects refer to the things that have a “legitimate claim to survival.”<sup>19</sup> Referent objects can vary. For example, the state (or sovereignty) has long been conceived to be the sole and

representative object of which survival must be protected at all costs. Aside from this, religion, identity, “secure property rights, the law, public services, and the freedom to contract and exchange” could all be considered as referent objects.<sup>20</sup>

Securitization theory’s epistemological premise posits that security is a speech act.<sup>21</sup> Put otherwise, securitization theory is about analyzing the performative power of discourse.<sup>22</sup> As Vivien A. Schmidt observes, discourse is “not only what you say, however; it includes to whom you say it, how, why, and where in the process of policy construction and political communication.”<sup>23</sup> Security is neither solely objective nor merely subjective. Securitization is an intersubjective and illocutionary process.<sup>24</sup>

Widening the sectors of security, therefore, is one of the most distinguishing pillars for the theory.<sup>25</sup> The securitization framework in this sense is particularly suitable for dealing with the dynamics of security and the economy, which can fluctuate depending on the extent to which political/economic institutions are extractive (or inclusive). The critical point here is that “the kind of Africa” observed in the 21st century alludes to both characteristics: linkages between regional trade blocs and security, on the one hand, and on the other, the effect of FTAs on security discourse. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual and theoretical framework for this study in a parallel structure.

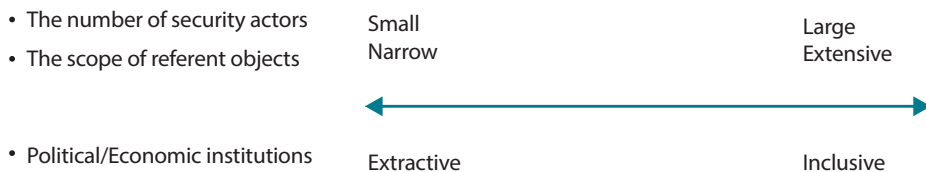


Figure 1. A Parallel Spectrum for Analysis<sup>26</sup>

## Security under Regional Economic Communities

Regional cooperation and integration are, of course, not exclusive to Africa, but the role of RECs is of great significance to achieving the aforementioned objectives of Africa with a whole-of-continent effort. As Article 3 of the Constitutive Act stipulates, in order to achieve the gradual attainment of the AU objectives, coordinating and harmonizing between the existing and future RECs is critical. In other words, promoting pan-continental unity is simply not possible without the trade blocs. Indeed, the continent that is larger than China, India, and the United States combined cannot stand alone unless RECs are successfully established.

It is in this context that regional integration has been “regarded as a possible panacea for the continent’s political and economic governance problem.”<sup>27</sup> The Abuja Treaty in 1991 was a turning point in moving the integration movement forward.<sup>28</sup> Article 4 of the Treaty reads “[The objectives of the RECs] shall be to promote economic, social and cultural development and the integration of African economies

in order to increase economic self-reliance.” Another milestone, the Sirte Declaration in 1999, served as a bridge between the pre-AU and AU eras. The establishment of the AU was decided in Sirte, a city in Libya known for its loyalty to Muammar Gaddafi who had wanted to see the United States of Africa. The declaration not only confirmed the process of implementing the Abuja Treaty, but it also aimed to accelerate and shorten the implementation periods.<sup>29</sup>

The needs and aspirations of the continent towards achieving regional integration have not abated. For instance, the principal topic of the AU summit held in 2007 in Accra, Ghana, was the formation of the Union Government, with the aim of laying the foundation for a United States of Africa. The Accra Declaration clearly indicates that rationalizing and strengthening the RECs and harmonizing their activities should be considered first and foremost in order to attain the Union Government. In addition, the first mid-term coordination meeting between the AU and the RECs held in Niamey, Niger, in 2019 was the latest version of such efforts. While acknowledging the continent’s weakest points, including implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, the first edition of the *African Regional Integration Report* concluded that “Africa is indeed progressing towards becoming an integrated, prosperous and peaceful continent.”<sup>30</sup> Put another way, the relationship between the AU and the RECs should be mutually supplementary.

The RECs are Janus-faced, however. Of particular note is the fact that equally important to recognizing the importance of pan-Africanism is the non-interference norm. The legacy of colonialism has prompted not only the passion for pan-African unity, but also for nationalism (a euphemism for tribalism). The problem is twofold. First, as elsewhere in the world, the principles of sovereign equality and respect of borders, which exist due to the achievement of independence, fundamentally impede a continent-wide integration. This is why the notion of an African continental government has been ridiculed from time to time. As Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the first prime minister of independent Nigeria, famously put it, a union government “might come, so might world government.”<sup>31</sup> Second, and relatedly, greater unity and solidarity between the African countries is hampered by the issue of “the lack of unity among the leaders of REC member states.”<sup>32</sup> In the case of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia, for example, neither CEN-SAD nor COMESA, to which both countries joined, are seen as having served in any meaningful way, whether it be economic or political, even as the tension over the Nile basin river system has been rising.

Nevertheless, it is true that the dominant ethos of the African community is that pan-continental unity can only be achieved through the leading role of regional structures. The principle of subsidiarity between the AU and the RECs is therefore particularly noteworthy.<sup>33</sup> Under these circumstances, despite their aforementioned limitations, the RECs have effectively been in charge of an “African solutions to African problems” discourse.<sup>34</sup>

It is in this context that the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) came into being. African leaders are “conscious of the fact that the scourge of conflicts in Africa constitutes a major impediment to the socio-economic development of the continent.”<sup>35</sup> From the deadliest Biafran War in Nigeria in the 1960s to the Lord’s Resistance Army insurgency in Uganda in the 1980s, and to the conflicts including the Islamic State, Boko Haram, and al-Shabaab in the 2010s, the continent has been fraught with various types of conflict. In addition to a catalogue of wars, poor governance, corruption, famines, and plagues have reinforced the image of Africa as a “pessimist’s paradise.”<sup>36</sup> Ironically, the confounded expectations for the post-colonial era were in part because of rapid decolonization. Transplanting Western-style states in Africa “carried an air of improbability” as it was reminiscent of the last colonial period.<sup>37</sup> It still is. Consequently, rhetoric stating “The European Union (EU) is a colonizer” is still frequently heard in meetings between EU and AU officials.<sup>38</sup>

In this respect, the APSA, as the AU’s blueprint for peace and security in Africa, uniquely represents an “African way of doing things.”<sup>39</sup> It pursues endogenous policies and African ownership of peace and security. Established and adopted by AU member states in 2002, it came into existence as “a set of institutions, legislation and procedures designed to address conflict prevention and promote peace and security.”<sup>40</sup> As Alex Vines points out, the AU–APSA mechanism plays an important role “both as a legitimizing institution and as a coordinating body.”<sup>41</sup> Hence, the APSA is a regime—a system of institutions, principles, norms, and decision-making procedures—and a continental security framework, rather than an institution. It is an “evolving peace and security regime.”<sup>42</sup>

The basic tenet of the APSA is that it is a collective security system. The protocol relating to the establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) stipulates that it “shall be a collective security and early-warning arrangement.” The spirit of “collective action” is also emblazoned on the Preamble of the Constitutive Act.<sup>43</sup> Despite the existence of some prototypes of military intervention among African states before the establishment of the AU–APSA mechanism, such as Nigeria’s intervention in the Sierra Leone Civil War in the 1990s and Rwanda’s active role in the First Congo War between 1996 and 1997, the APSA distinguishes itself from the pre-APSA period in that it is compliant with the principle of responsibility to protect (R2P), as mentioned in Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act. However, as indicated, what the APSA represents is beyond collectivism. It is collectivism based on regional integration.

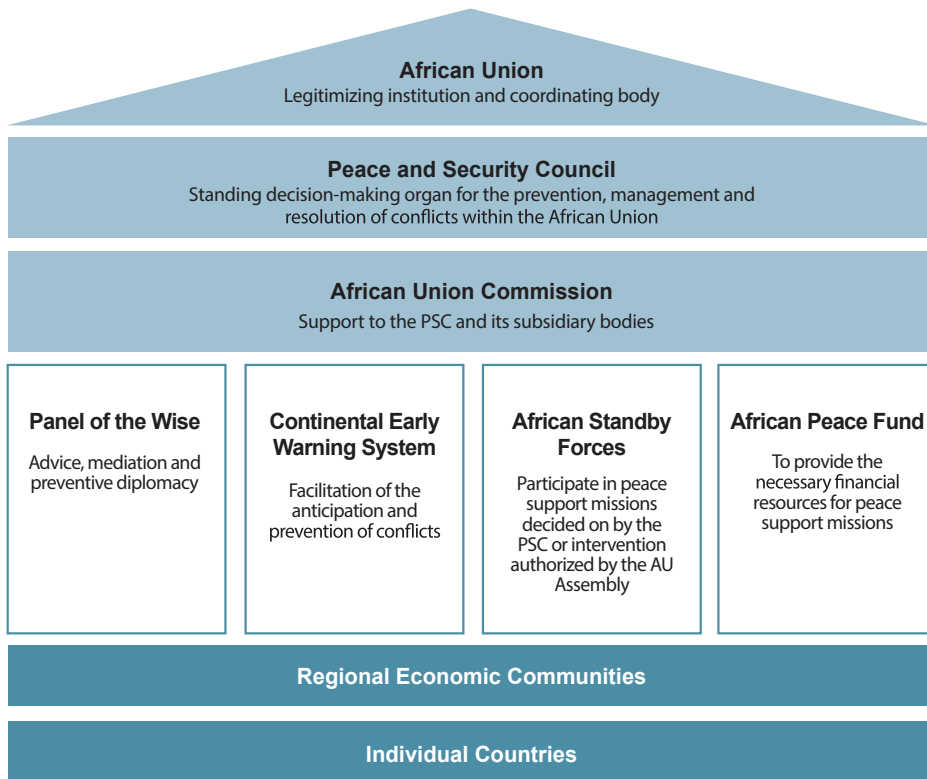


Figure 2. The Structure of the APSA<sup>44</sup>

Somewhat paradoxically, APSA’s commitment to such collectivism is *ipso facto* a restriction. And this is where the issue of the relationship between economic capability and military mobilization occurs. Exactly because of its characteristics—the relationship between the AU and the RECs pointing to the principle of subsidiarity is a key to maintaining the APSA—the operation of the African security structure is “heavily dependent on the commitment of the RECs.”<sup>45</sup> Without cooperation from the RECs, for example, the African Standby Forces cannot exist; the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) will be undermined; and, advice and mediation efforts from the Panel of the Wise will also be ignored.

Critically, the issue of economic capability crops up in all aspects of the problems experienced in the process so far. Securing reliable and sustainable sources of funding has persistently been a thorny issue that causes a gap between capabilities and expectations. For example, the amount of the African Peace Fund, the principal financial instrument for security missions, still lags far behind the expected level. Despite the increasing value of the fund, as of February 2020, the fund had less than half of the budget it had originally targeted, and this has led the AU to delay the year of operationalization of the fund from 2020 to 2023.<sup>46</sup> Not surprisingly, again, this is



related to the financial problems that are faced by the RECs. Except for ECOWAS, most RECs have a limited budget and are dependent on external donors. Even SADC, which has relative stability with South Africa leading the bloc, has been struggling with financial problems and relying on international partners.<sup>47</sup>

The challenges of resources and logistics also arise from the same economic issue. In order to supply logistical support to field missions, the passage of goods and equipment is essential. However, the RECs have proved unable to take proper measures to ensure the member states are bearing the necessary financial costs, nor has the AU reimbursement system, whereby the AU recompenses member states that timely finance peace operations, worked in practice.<sup>48</sup> Whatever the causes, this has resulted in the APSA being caught in a vicious cycle. That is, instead of accomplishing “African solutions to African problems,” the AU and RECs continue to seek financial support from extra-regional donors including former colonial occupiers, and they have therefore inadvertently fulfilled a cliché (which is also an immutable truism): “he who pays the piper calls the tune.”

Yet the financial issues are not the sole cause of the problems. There is a slew of issues: poor governance, overlapping memberships of RECs, normative variance in determining when to intervene in each other’s domestic politics from the principles of R2P, the blurry relationship between the AU and RECs, and so forth. In essence, whether it be economically-related or not, the AU–APSA mechanism has failed to provide the space for the civilian component in the formation of security discourse. The mechanism, fraught with the issues of the regional subsidiarity principle, has in effect resulted in the absence of a discursive space for citizen-led securitization.

## **Security under AfCFTA**

### ***The Emergence of AfCFTA***

Notwithstanding all the catchphrases of the regional integration in Africa with regard to promoting peace, security, and stability—and, despite the AU member states being aware of the importance of the “relation between democracy, rule of law and economic development”<sup>49</sup>—the AU–APSA systems have failed to show a clear linkage among those components (i.e., the ways in which regional integration, peace and security, democracy, and economic development are harmoniously combined and actualized in a practical sense). Rather, stemming from the colonial era, and throughout the period when the different RECs were established and the AU–APSA mechanism was introduced, even in the economic realm power and influence were further concentrated “in the hands of a few politically connected businessmen.”<sup>50</sup>

In relation to constructing the security–economy nexus, an anachronism has persisted. For example, relevance to African citizens has been limited, the

organizations—whether they be continental or regional institutions—have been fragmented, the states and rule of law were secondary to personal preferences and, as a result of these preferences, substantive public sector reform has been “blocked by an incumbent political elite that also comprises some of the largest players in the commercial realm.”<sup>51</sup> Under such circumstances, the core concern among all the issues remains the same as in the pre-AU era. And this concern is succinctly pointed out by Paul D. Williams:

The fact that the APSA remains almost entirely dependent on external financial support more than a decade after it began is a worrying sign that raises questions about the level of political commitment African states have to the enterprise. It also provides significant evidence in support of the hypothesis that some African governments view the APSA as just another way of extracting resources to help ensure regime survival rather than as a set of their own mechanisms to resolve peace and security crises on the continent.<sup>52</sup>

The AfCFTA needs to be understood against this backdrop. The security–economy nexus manifests itself given that “trade arrangements have undeniably been used by countries as tools with which to bolster existing security alliances and recruit new partners.”<sup>53</sup> Even in this case, however, the economic mechanism forms a much larger role in the continental security environment in Africa as shown in the case of their security mechanism under the RECs. Additionally, within the context of trade arrangements, the security–economy nexus goes beyond the traditional security concerns as trade negotiations (especially for an FTA) usually involve non-traditional security issues, such as control of environmental issues and movement of natural persons. It is in this sense that seeing the AfCFTA from a pure economic viewpoint would be a mistake. Taken together, investigating the potential of the AfCFTA from a security viewpoint is of great significance to evaluating not only its current status but also its future standing as a representative security–economy pillar of Africa.

The AfCFTA might be seen as a regional trade agreement (RTA) when viewed on a global scale, as the scope of the agreement is limited to the African continent. However, it is the world’s largest free trade area endorsed by all 54 African countries in which more than 1.3 billion people reside, with an economy worth \$2.5 trillion (so it is at least a Mega RTA as a tool for overcoming the limitations of bilateral FTAs). Furthermore, given that intra–African trade has been low (intra–Africa exports in 2018 were 15 percent of Africa’s world exports), and that the intra–REC trade has been largely concentrated on a specific region (SADC member states account for 50 percent of intra–Africa exports),<sup>54</sup> the AfCFTA, once fully up and running, is expected to play a key role in the global market for many African countries.

Of course, a continent–wide FTA is not a universal remedy for the continent’s political, economic and social ills. Nor is regional economic integration. Widening and deepening a free market, to an extent, bears the negativity of *laissez-faire* economic

integration. Nonetheless, neither FTAs nor regional economic integration should be judged by the standardized criticism or disapproval of neoliberalism that highlights the dark side of the global market. Claims that liberal economic policy accentuates “a degeneration of a state institution” while accelerating privatization and deregulation need to be reconsidered in the first quarter of the twenty-first century, during which time developing countries in Africa have enthusiastically pursued the conclusion of a free trade area.<sup>55</sup>

The reason the AfCFTA should not be measured by the same yardstick that has applied to the neoliberal agenda is because the AfCFTA is not just about deregulation or degeneration of a state institution. In effect, it opens the room for regulating corruption and mediocre administrations that have pervaded individual state’s apparatus in the region. It also needs to be remembered that the AfCFTA is an outgrowth of African leaders’ passion for escaping from the neocolonial situation wherein the rich countries induce the developing countries to adopt the *laissez-faire* model.

What is more, just as ethnicity has often mistakenly been regarded as a root cause of all conflicts in Africa even as it is a victim of politicians who manipulate ethnical identities for their political purposes,<sup>56</sup> economic integration itself should not be misunderstood as something which engenders negative externalities. If anything, “African countries were far more integrated in the global trade patterns of the 11th through 19th centuries than of the 20th.”<sup>57</sup> In that context, the AfCFTA is more akin to a historically accumulated instrument of continent-wide integration and a more comprehensive economic and social partnership agreement, rather than a simple FTA. What should be noted is that the AfCFTA is the second-fastest instrument to be ratified in the African continent since the establishment of the AU (the fastest one to be ratified was the AU Constitutive Act itself). Besides, the fact that the AfCFTA has become a flagship of AU’s *Agenda 2063*, which is Africa’s masterplan for structural transformation, also corroborates the singularity of the AfCFTA. The rest of this article explores the possible role of the AfCFTA in constructing a renewed discursive framework for the African security–economy nexus.

### ***A New Framework for African Security***

As has already been indicated, ruminating about a new framework for African security through the lens of the AfCFTA should not be limited to a dichotomous debate (i.e., whether economic integration is harmful or not). For better or for worse, the one sure thing is that the AfCFTA as market integration is a process. Given that it took nearly 40 years for Europe to get to the depth of integration that the EU has achieved today (from the Treaties of Rome in 1957 to the Maastricht Treaty in 1992), it goes without saying that it will take a long time to reach the stage of full implementation of Africa’s market integration objectives. Hence, instead of asking either “what if the AfCFTA fails to stimulate the African economy?” or “if the AfCFTA fails, what would

be the consequences for security?,” it might be better to ask “in what ways can the implementation of the AfCFTA change the current *modus operandi* of the security–economy nexus?”

Given the distinctive nature of the AfCFTA, it would be fairly difficult to predict its direct effect on security issues. Another caveat that needs to be kept in mind is that the AfCFTA itself is “a consolidated text of legal instruments comprising Protocols, Annexes, Appendices and Guidelines.”<sup>58</sup> This means that the mandate given to the AfCFTA secretariat is quite narrow in and of itself, for it cannot introduce measures for security *per se*. Therefore, the effect of the AfCFTA on security issues can only be measured in a vicarious manner.

For carrying out such a vicarious prediction, the current conflict trends in Africa need to be taken into consideration in the first place. Despite the high number of conflicts in Africa, “the increase in number of conflicts in recent years can in large part be explained by the rise of the Islamic State (IS).”<sup>59</sup> As one PSC report rightly pointed out, “the lack of economic opportunities has made it easier for extremist groups to recruit young people.”<sup>60</sup> In Africa, poverty and unemployment are not only the main drivers of insecurity but also the consequences of it.<sup>61</sup> A case in point would be Mali, a country that has long been tainted by continuous terrorist activities as well as a high extreme poverty rate. Moreover, Mali has become the latest country in Africa where a military coup has occurred. Although the PSC of the AU and a REC (in this case, ECOWAS) played a central role in establishing the democratically endorsed transitional process after the mutiny in August 2020, the political transition would pale in significance, and terrorism would continue to prevail as the extreme grievances of young people are taken lightly. This is where the role of the AfCFTA arises once again. The World Bank estimated that the poverty rate in Mali would decline from 14.4 percent to 6.8 percent with the implementation of the AfCFTA (Mali ratified the AfCFTA agreement in February 2019). This means that the AfCFTA should thus be seen as a “long-term response framework to the structural socio-economic drivers of insecurity.”<sup>62</sup>

Concerning the effect of the AfCFTA on interstate conflicts, the “trade expectations theory” may be beneficial. While not subscribing exclusively to liberal theory (in which economic interdependence can foster peace) or realist theory (in which interdependence increases a systemic incentive to use force), trade expectations theory observes that “interdependence can foster peace, as liberals argue, but this will only be so when states expect that trade levels will be high into the foreseeable future.”<sup>63</sup> Following this logic, the AfCFTA can be peace-inducing rather than war-inducing taken as a whole. “Market transition theory” gives a similar insight into the peace-inducing role of the AfCFTA, as markets contribute to “a shift in the sources of power from the redistributive sector [*extractive*] to the marketplace [*inclusive*].”<sup>64</sup> More importantly, given that interstate war in Africa has become a rare event since the second Congolese War (1998–2003), it is fair to say that the AfCFTA alone is

not likely to be a cause of conflict between states, so long as the market transition is combined with progressive democratization.

The remaining question, then, is to determine in what ways the AfCFTA can bring transformation of the securitization process, which has hitherto concentrated the power of setting the security agenda in a small handful of politicians and another small number of politically connected businessmen. The first outcome would be that a boosted intra-agricultural system of trade under the AfCFTA can potentially lay the foundations for more than 60 percent of Africans living in rural areas to express their referent objects in a more organized way.<sup>65</sup> In particular, given that small-scale farmers account for the vast majority of Africans in the agricultural sector, on condition that the purposes of protecting an infant industry is well in place, the AfCFTA is likely to shift smallholders towards higher-value activities, which in turn leads to more effective productivity and the reduction of poverty.<sup>66</sup> Attention is particularly drawn to the role of women, “who make up the majority of smallholder farmers in the region.”<sup>67</sup> By embedding continent-wide agricultural trade regulations into the state’s apparatus, the AfCFTA can contribute to reducing the unfair practices in the agricultural market of each country, including unreliable contract enforcement, burdensome tax requirements, and ambiguous land-related customary law.

Second, other commodities sectors, such as trade in non-agricultural goods (e.g., natural gas, oil, precious and industrial metals), can also be more systematically regulated through the AfCFTA. Among others, the energy sector accounts for 22 percent of intra-Africa exports.<sup>68</sup> As in the case of the agriculture and food industry, the energy sector has suffered from the uncertainties of the regulatory environment, including poor contract enforcement and the intimidation of expropriation of concessions (for example, see the Madagascan and Ugandan governments). In addition, the fact that non-agricultural goods trade in Africa has weak positive linkages with the wider society and that oil-producing states have serious levels of income inequality (as for example in Angola, Equatorial Guinea, and Nigeria) needs to be taken into consideration.<sup>69</sup> This is yet another example of state-managed cartels that have marginalized and excluded civil society. Therefore, the implementation of the trade in commodities ought to be conducted in a way that enhances linkages between the hydrocarbon industry and local residents in terms of education, skills, and employment.

Third, the ways in which the AfCFTA contributes to establishing a strong manufacturing sector across the continent will be of great importance to providing civil society with more opportunities in raising their voice. Increasing domestic demand in major retail subsectors (e.g., furniture, clothing, footwear, food, and household cleaners), exponential growth in mobile technologies (e.g., Safaricom’s M-PESA), and the rise of African consumer power (43 percent of Africans are projected to be middle class by 2030) all boil down to the potential of Africa’s manufacturing and industrialization.<sup>70</sup> According to Deloitte’s “Global Manufacturing Competitiveness

Index,” key drivers of global manufacturing competitiveness relate to human capital (i.e., talent, workforce productivity, and education).<sup>71</sup> This means that the AfCFTA should be geared towards improving the quality of the member states’ workforce.

Challenges to fulfilling such potential of the AfCFTA come from two ways: on the one hand, material hindrances to the implementation of the AfCFTA, and on the other hand, the potential pitfalls immanent in the FTA. The former challenge—comprising a workforce perceived to be lacking in skills and efficiency, burdensome bureaucracies, and poor infrastructure—may seem bigger, but it can be overcome by political will along with created opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as for individuals, to access information about their customers and competition. What seems to matter more is the latter: the nature of the FTA. James J. Hentz, for instance, argued that most threats, such as small arms and an HIV/AIDS epidemic, would travel more easily by economic integration in the developing world.<sup>72</sup> The possibility of illicit financial flows and human/drug trafficking might also increase. Some might say that the number of insurgencies and violent extremism will increase as people move freely across borders. There has also been growing fear that least developed countries, such as Malawi, are “likely to be left grappling with the negative effects of tariff cuts in the form of substantial fiscal revenue loss.”<sup>73</sup>

These concerns, of course, should not be disregarded. Nonetheless, it should also be noted that the aforementioned issues have never been silent even before the AfCFTA era. The Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, despite being rich in resources, found itself caught in perpetual conflict over the control of resources among militias and rebel groups. In the Central African Republic, mineral resources, cattle, and trade routes have been fought over by armed groups. South Sudan—the world’s youngest democracy and a country where mineral resources and oil are widespread—has also been hampered by a similar situation. In the case of Malawi, a counterargument to the “revenue loss” thesis can be made, as “Malawi’s membership of the AfCFTA may open up markets in non-SADC and non-COMESA countries” for its exports.<sup>74</sup> By the same token, cross-border movement of people can be seen as a development source of skilled labor, rather than as a threat. More importantly, free movement of persons does not mean that all people can freely move; rather, what the AfCFTA enables is the free movement of businesspersons. The roles of the PSC of the AU and the AfCFTA secretariat should, therefore, be supplementary to each other (neither contradictory nor competitive) in that context.

This is why the AfCFTA needs to be akin to the concept of “embedded liberalism,” whereby three actors—markets, states, and civil society—are equally considered in the form of a triangular relationship in the process of globalization.<sup>75</sup> In sum, African security under the AfCFTA has the potential for transforming the state-centered mechanism into a more balanced one in terms of articulating respective referent objects in constructing security discourse. The significance of the AfCFTA in security terms arises from the fact that it has the power to break down what Göran Hydén called “the

economy of affection (a network of support, communication, and interaction among structurally defined groups connected by blood, kin, community, or other affinities),<sup>76</sup> from which intra-state conflicts originate. Table 1 shows the changing patterns of securitization in Africa within the context of the political and economic sectors.

Table 1. Changing Characteristics of Securitization in Africa

Period Components	OAU–early RECs	AU–RECs	AU–RECs–AfCFTA
Principal security actors: Entities that make securitizing movement	Elite social strata (first generation of independence movements)	Elite social strata (second generation of independence movements)	Elite & non-elite social strata
Existential threats: Threats that can be understood in relation to the referent object in question	Threats that challenge sovereignty of newly established independent countries (e.g., a resurgence of metropole)	Threats that challenge the vested rights of the elite social strata	Underdevelopment (threats that hinder a decent living standard for all)
Referent objects: Objects that are being threatened and need to be protected	Centralization of state power (nationalism & anti-colonialism); Reducing African debt	Stabilizing crisis-stricken economies; Regional subsidiarity	Intra–African investment; Coordinating regulations; Political and economic welfare of ordinary citizens (human capital)
Targeted audiences: Targets of the securitization act	The Cold War powers (e.g., USSR & USA); International institutions (e.g., IMF, World Bank)	State-owned enterprises; Politically connected businessmen; Global investors (extractive)	Small and medium-sized enterprises; Middle class; Global investors (inclusive)

## Conclusion

The AfCFTA should not be merely regarded as an economic scheme. The arrangement represents “a new strategic approach—less state-driven, with more cooperation among civil society formations.”<sup>77</sup> The AfCFTA is therefore about restructuring the way that markets, states, and civil society exchange knowledge, ideas, and opinions, which will, in turn, renovate and enlarge a space for security discourse covering not only political elites’ referent objects, but also those of ordinary citizens. As securitization theorists observe, “a speech act is interesting exactly because it holds the insurrecting potential to break the ordinary, to establish meaning that is not already within the context.”<sup>78</sup> The AfCFTA in this regard can become a performative force that could change how discursive formations are conducted in the region. To reiterate, however, this article

does not argue that the AfCFTA will definitely have positive cascading effects. Whether the AfCFTA can drive the structural transformation of African economies in a substantial manner remains to be seen. The outcome will, of course, depend to a large extent on the degree of commitment of individual African governments. That being said, the AfCFTA should be seen with a long-term focus that provides better options for enhancing human security in Africa, which goes beyond modernization in material terms. While recognizing the possible pitfalls of a free trade deal, it is important to acknowledge there is an urgent necessity to pay more attention to the potential of the deal and to focus on finding practical ways of implementing it in a way that can make civil society's voice (their referent objects) emerge loud and clear.

## Notes

1. The above-mentioned sentence also connotes the changing discourses of the deepening and broadening of the security agenda in Security Studies.
2. Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 226.
3. Ian Taylor, *African Politics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018), 120–21.
4. Colin Legum, "The Organisation of African Unity—Success or Failure?" *International Affairs* 51, no. 2 (1975): 214.
5. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, *The New African Initiative: A Merger of the Millennium African Renaissance Partnership Programme and the Omega Plan* (Pretoria, South Africa, July 2001), 1–60.
6. The principles of sovereign equality and non-interference appeared in earnest in Article 4 of the Constitutive Act. The article also introduces the right of the AU to "intervene" in member states "pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances," such as war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity (Article 4-h). Paul D. Williams, "From Non-intervention to Non-indifference: The Origins and Development of the African Union's Security Culture," *African Affairs* 106, no. 423 (2007): 253–79.
7. The AU recognizes eight RECs as follows: Arab Maghreb Union (UMA); Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA); Community of Sahel–Saharan States (CEN–SAD); East African Community (EAC); Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS); Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD); and Southern African Development Community (SADC).
8. Security Studies started to regard human development (what is known as human security), ranging from reducing income poverty/inequality to enlarging people's capabilities and choices, as something to be secured (i.e., referent object) since the early 1990s.
9. Ross Poole, "Locke and the Bourgeois State," *Political Studies* 28, no. 2 (1980): 222–37.
10. Russel Hardin, "Democracy and Collective Bads," in *Democracy's Edges*, eds., Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Cordon (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 80.
11. Philip Pettit, "Republican Freedom and Contestatory Democratization," in *Democracy's Value*, eds., Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Cordon (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 183.
12. Broadly speaking, there are two dimensions that capture the relationship between trade and security. For those who claim that trade reduces conflict, see for example Edward D. Mansfield and Jon C. Pevehouse, "Trade Blocs, Trade Flows, and International Conflict," *International Organization* 54, no. 4 (Autumn 2000): 775–808. For arguments that trade has no visible effect,



- see Hyung Min Kim and David L. Rousseau, "The Classical Liberals Were Half Right (or Half Wrong): New Tests of the 'Liberal Peace,' 1960–88," *Journal of Peace Research* 42, no. 5 (2005): 523–43.
13. Vinod K. Aggarwal and Kristi Govella, *Linking Trade and Security: Evolving Institutions and Strategies in Asia, Europe, and the United States* (New York, NY: Springer, 2013), 226–33.
  14. Yul Sohn and Min Gyo Koo, "Securitizing Trade: The Case of the Korea–U.S. Free Trade Agreement," *International Relations of the Asia–Pacific* 11, no. 3 (September 2011): 433–60.
  15. Seungjoo Lee, "The Emergence of an Economic–Security Nexus and the Diversity of FTA Linkage Strategies in East Asia," *The Korean Journal of Policy Studies* 27, no. 1 (2012): 123.
  16. The distinction among neopatrimonialism, patrimonialism, and clientelism is often blurred. For the definitions, see Gero Erdmann, "Neopatrimonialism and Political Regimes," in *Routledge Handbook of African Politics*, eds., Nic Cheeseman, David A. Anderson, and Andrea Scheibler (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2015), 59–69.
  17. Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (New York, NY: Crown Business, 2012), 81.
  18. *Ibid.*, 82. From the viewpoint of social movement theory, the ways in which extractive institutions transform into more inclusive institutions can be analogous to the expansion of political opportunity structure. See Sungsoo Kim, *The Role of the Middle Class in Korea Democratization* (Seoul, ROK: Jimoondang, 2008); and Sydney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
  19. Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 36.
  20. Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 75.
  21. Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*, 26.
  22. For the concept of performative power, see Yong Wook Lee, "Performing Civilisational Narratives in East Asia: Asian Values, Multiple Modernities, and the Politics of Economic Development," *Review of International Studies* (2020), doi: 10.1017/S0260210520000212.
  23. Vivien A. Schmidt, "Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse," *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (2008): 310.
  24. Speech acts can be classified into three types: locutionary (superficial meaning of a speech), illocutionary (real meaning of a speech by which the speaker intended to persuade audiences) and perlocutionary (the actual effect of a speech act; in this case, the audiences are "persuaded" by a speaker). For speech act theory, see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1975), 98–132.
  25. For the criticisms and evolution of securitization theory in the discipline of international relations, see Thierry Balzacq, Sarah Léonard, and Jan Ruzicka, "'Securitization' Revisited: Theory and Cases," *International Relations* 30, no. 4 (2016): 494–531. While acknowledging the differing "schools" of securitization theory, such as the Copenhagen, Paris, and Welsh (or Aberystwyth) Schools, this article delves into the characteristics of the economic sector within the securitization theory framework put forward by the Copenhagen School, rather than the academic debate on the question of securitization theory itself.
  26. The increasing number of security actors should be interpreted from the perspective of "popular sovereignty" in the Lockean terms, instead of being seen as either "people's democracy" or "authoritarian democracy" whereby political elites attempt to obscure their responsibilities for policy failures.
  27. Atieno Ndomo, *Regional Economic Communities in Africa: A Progress Overview* (Nairobi, Kenya: GTZ, 2009), 8.
  28. The formal name of the Abuja Treaty is "Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community."
  29. According to the Abuja Treaty, the African Economic Community was to be completed within 34 years from the date of entry into force (May 12, 1994), a six-stage sequential approach. For more information, see Article 6 of the Treaty.

30. PSC Report, *Defining AU–REC Relations Is Still a Work in Progress*, <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/defining-aurec-relations-is-still-a-work-in-progress> (accessed July 15, 2020).
31. Opoku Agyeman, “The Osagyefo, the Mwalimu, and Pan–Africanism: A Study in the Growth of a Dynamic Concept,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 13, no. 4 (1975): 653.
32. Peter Arthur, “Promoting Security in Africa through Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the African Union’s African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA),” *Insight on Africa* 9, no. 1 (2017): 14.
33. PSC Report, *Defining AU–REC Relations Is Still a Work in Progress*.
34. Although the phrase “African solutions to African problems” was coined by the eminent Ghanaian political economist George Ayittey, it can be traced back to another phrase, “Try Africa first,” as stipulated in the OAU Charter.
35. Constitutive Act preamble paragraph 8.
36. Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, 219.
37. Christopher Clapham, “Discerning the New Africa,” *International Affairs* 74, no. 2 (1998): 266.
38. Aarie Glas, “African Union Security Culture in Practice: African Problems and African Solutions,” *International Affairs* 94, no. 5 (2018): 1130–31.
39. *Ibid.*, 1122.
40. European Court of Auditors, *Special Report: The African Peace and Security Architecture: Need to Refocus EU Support* (Luxembourg: European Union, 2018), 4.
41. Alex Vines, “A Decade of African Peace and Security Architecture,” *International Affairs* 89, no. 1 (2013): 95.
42. Ulf Engel and João Gomes Porto, “The African Union’s New Peace and Security Architecture: Toward an Evolving Security Regime?” *African Security* 2, no. 2–3 (2009): 93.
43. Constitutive Act preamble paragraph 4.
44. Adapted from European Court of Auditors, *Special Report*, 5.
45. Vines, “A Decade of African Peace and Security Architecture,” 104.
46. Giulia Paravicini, “African Union Delays Plan to Start Using Fund for Security Operations,” Reuters, February 11, 2020.
47. Arthur, “Promoting Security in Africa,” 12.
48. Paul D. Williams, “Reflections on the Evolving African Peace and Security Architecture,” *African Security* 7, no. 3 (2014): 155–56.
49. Yayew Genet Chekol, “African Union Institutional Reform: Rationales, Challenges and Prospects,” *Insight on Africa* 12, no. 1 (2020): 34.
50. Jake Bright and Aubrey Hruby, *The Next Africa: An Emerging Continent Becomes a Global Powerhouse* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2015), 129–30.
51. *Ibid.*, 127.
52. Williams, “Reflections on the Evolving African Peace,” 158.
53. Aggarwal and Govella, *Linking Trade and Security*, 242.
54. Tralac, “The African Continental Free Trade Area: A Tralac Guide,” *Trade Law Centre*, November 2019, 10–13.
55. Juhana Vartiainen, “Successful State Intervention in Industrial Transformation,” in *The Developmental State*, ed. Meredith Woo-Cumings (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 220. For the criticism of neoliberalism, see Ha-Joon Chang, *Bad Samaritans: The Guilty Secrets of Rich Nations & The Threat to Global Prosperity* (London, UK: Random House, 2007).
56. If ethnic difference was the cradle of all African conflicts, the continent—in which there are over 3,000 different ethnic groups—will never stop fighting. Rather, the real problem lies with the fact that ethnicity gets politicized, securitized, and instrumentalized as somebody’s agenda. Widening the realm of security actors that can actively participate in setting the agenda (referent objects) is therefore important.
57. Bright and Hruby, *The Next Africa*, 64.
58. Dennis Ndonga, Emmanuel Laryea, and Murendere Chaponda, “Assessing the Potential Impact of the African Continental Free Trade Area on Least Developed Countries: A Case Study of

- Malawi,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 46, no. 4 (2020): 777.
59. Ingrid Vik Bakken and Siri Aas Rustad, “Conflict Trends in Africa, 1989–2017,” *PRIO Conflict Trends*, June 2018.
  60. PSC Report, *Africa’s Free Trade Initiative Could Bolster Continental Peace*, <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/africas-free-trade-initiative-could-bolster-continental-peace> (accessed February 8, 2021).
  61. Ibid.
  62. Ibid.
  63. Dale C. Copeland, “Economic Interdependence and War,” *International Security* 20, no. 4 (Spring 1996): 7.
  64. Victor Nee, “A Theory of Market Transition: From Redistribution to Markets in State Socialism,” *American Sociological Review* 54, no. 5 (October 1989): 678.
  65. African Development Bank, *Feed Africa: Strategy for Agricultural Transformation in Africa 2016–2025* (Abidjan, Ivory Coast: African Development Bank Group, 2016), vii.
  66. For example, see Alonge Esone, “Smart Farming: At the Forefront of African Agriculture,” *Business Chief*, October 30, 2019.
  67. Landry Signé, *Unlocking Africa’s Business Potential: Trends, Opportunities, Risks, and Strategies* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2020), 69.
  68. Tralac, “The African Continental Free Trade Area,” 16.
  69. Signé, *Unlocking Africa’s Business Potential*, 145–58.
  70. Landry Signé, “Africa’s Emerging Economies to Take the Lead in Consumer Market Growth,” *Africa in Focus*, April 3, 2019.
  71. Deloitte, *2016 Global Manufacturing Competitiveness Index* (London: Deloitte, 2016), 17.
  72. James J. Hentz, “The Southern African Security Order: Regional Economic Integration and Security among Developing States,” *Review of International Studies* 35 (2009): 189–213.
  73. Ndonga, Laryea, and Chponda, “Assessing the Potential Impact,” 782. According to the IMF, as of 2018, Malawi’s international trade taxes as a percentage of total government revenue accounted for 7.6 percent compared with 3.3 percent of the world’s average.
  74. Ibid., 785.
  75. John Gerard Ruggie, “International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order,” *International Organization* 36, no. 2 (1982): 379–415.
  76. Buzan and Wæver, *Regions and Powers*, 228.
  77. Anthoni van Nieuwkerk, “The Regional Roots of the African Peace and Security Architecture: Exploring Centre–Periphery Relations,” *South African Journal of International Affairs* 18, no. 2 (2011): 186.
  78. Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, *Security*, 46.

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