

Task Force 1: Peace, Security and Global Governance



G7 and Africa: A Paramount Alliance for Multilateral Peace Efforts

Francesca Caruso, Senior Analyst at the International Relations Office, Community of Sant'Egidio, Italy

Bernardo Venturi, Adjunct Professor, University of Bologna; Co-Founder and Head of Research and Policy, Agency for Peacebuilding (AP); Associate Fellow, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Italy

Abstract

The international order is increasingly being challenged by a multitude of conflicts in several geographical regions, involving different actors, from governments to militia groups. The recurrence and persistence of such conflicts have accelerated the crisis of the multilateral system, incapable of both preventing and resolving wars. The Presidency of the G7 stated that two major priorities will be the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. Here, however, the homogeneity of the G7 might undermine its ability to find innovative solutions and limit its global perspective. The inclusion of countries from the “Global South”, even as observers, might mitiga-

te this risk. Due to demography and natural resources, countries from the African continent (and their international organizations) could be crucial interlocutors that might play a key role. Moreover, regular inclusion in G7 summits might help the group strategize on how to tackle the numerous conflicts in the African continent itself, by providing support to multilateral peace operations, peace-making and peacebuilding missions.

Introduction

During the last two years, the global order has been challenged by a multitude of old and new conflicts ranging from Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine to the Israel-Hamas war, the Sudan conflict, the jihadi threat in the Sahel region and the Red Sea crisis sparked by the Iran-Houthi movement against Israel. These conflicts, increasingly interlinked in one way or another, have accelerated the crisis of the multilateral system, incapable of both preventing and resolving wars.

During its G7 Presidency, the Italian government has stated that the war in Ukraine and the Middle East will be two major priorities. Yet, the composition of the G7 risks undermining the capability of the informal group to find innovative solutions and adopt a global perspective to these conflicts. The risk could be averted by trying to include in the discussion other actors as observers, especially from the so-called "Global South".

In this framework, this policy brief dedicates specific attention to how the G7 might involve African leading countries and organizations in this process. Demography and natural resources make the African continent a potential interlocutor that might play an important role in the global markets in the near future. Furthermore, as Africa remains the continent with the major number of wars, conflicts and protracted crises, its regularly inclusion in the G7 summits might help the group to strategise its effort toward international security. It could also help the G7 to contribute to reducing violence in Africa by providing support to multilateral peace operations, peacemaking and peacebuilding missions. Besides, considering how some African countries such as South Africa are playing an increasingly international role, African leaders can be more present in multilateral efforts to end wars.

1. Why does Africa matter: a new global power?

1.1 Opportunities: Youth and natural resources

The world is changing and the G7 need to start reimagining Africa's place in it. Three decades ago, the G7 aggregated nearly 70 per cent of the global economy in nominal terms, while today only 44 per cent. Moreover, by 2023 the BRICS countries hold a total 32 per cent of the world's GDP compared to 30 per cent held by G7 countries (Statista 2023). A small and cohesive group

with similar views might help to take collective decisions but it risks becoming progressively more and more marginalized from when it was created. In this respect, to regularly invite and involve African partners might be instrumental for the group to adopt a less entrenched approach. Numbers and facts justify this assumption. The continent is increasingly gaining political weight in the global arena due to its demographic boom, abundant natural resources and strategic geographical location. In 1900 Africa's population was estimated to be about 140 million accounting for 9 per cent of the world's population at that time. On the contrary, by 2050 25 per cent of the population will be African. More importantly, within the next decade, Africa will have the world's largest workforce surpassing China and India. Africa is also home to nearly one-third of all minerals. According to the United Nations, Africa is home to about 30 per cent of the world's mineral reserves, 12 per cent of the world's oil and 8 per cent of the world's natural gas reserves.¹ The Russia-war in Ukraine demonstrated the value of African natural resources with Western countries – among which France and Italy – that directed their attention to the Continent to boost energy cooperation.

Involving Africa in the G7 would not only ensure a more inclusive and representative approach to global governance but also harness the continent's potential as a driver of economic growth, innovation, and sustainable development on the global stage.

1.2 Challenges: Military coups, conflicts and humanitarian crisis

Despite numbers, the crisis of governance, multilateral system and multipolar competition is reflected also in the stability and peace of the Continent. Africa is still home of conflicts, undemocratic backlash and humanitarian crises. Since 2019, Africa – and in particular West Africa – witnessed 9 military coups. The resurgence of coups is indicative of the failure of civilian leaders to uphold democratic values combined, in some regions like the Sahel, with the failure to deal with Islamist insurgency. However, new military juntas – especially in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger – have called into question their alliances with traditional partners such as France, claimed national sovereignty and the desire to diversify their allies – especially Russia (Caruso and Lenzi 2023).

Furthermore, the continent comes second after the MENA region in the number of armed conflicts per region with more than 35 armed conflicts taking place.² In the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia faces major obstacles on its path toward political stability and peace (Gleixner-Hayat 2023), while Sudan witnesses one of the fastest unfolding crises globally due to the outbreak of the war in April 2023. In the Great Lakes Region, tensions are escalating rapidly in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Insecurity, combined with the consequences of climate change and structural

¹ UN Environment Programme (UNEP) website: *Our work in Africa*. <https://www.unep.org/node/18311>.

² Geneva Academy website: *Today's armed conflicts*. <https://geneva-academy.ch/galleries/today-s-armed-conflicts>.

poverty, is provoking unprecedented humanitarian crisis.³

All of this is happening in a context in which regional cooperation is weakening, multipolar competition is increasing, and global powers seem unable to find a durable solution to crises. The multitude of conflicts, instability, and humanitarian crises plaguing Africa underscores the urgent need for the continent to be included in the discussions and decision-making processes of the G7. These conflicts pose significant challenges not only to the affected countries but also to regional stability and global security. By including Africa in the G7, the international community can mobilize resources and coordinate efforts to address these challenges. The conflicts in Africa have implications for global security, as they provide fertile ground for extremism, terrorism, and transnational crime. Addressing the root causes of these conflicts, such as governance failures, poverty, and inequality, is essential for promoting long-term stability and security in the region and beyond. The G7, as a forum for leading industrialised nations, has a responsibility to contribute to global peace and security by engaging with Africa and supporting efforts to resolve conflicts and address underlying drivers of instability.

1.3 Africa and its role at the global level

Africa has largely remained a receiver of political actions on peace, security, development or good governance. The European Union and the Western governments often mention the centrality of partnerships *with* Africa, but these intentions are rarely implemented. Africa needs more security, peace mediators, and certainly more development. African countries need innovation, peacekeeping missions, experts and definitively many foreign experts and advisors. This approach does not recognise the African agency at the global level and tragically reinforces the vision of “Western solutions to African problems”.

Yet, the increasing African global role should be recognised and duly considered due to some changing trends and approaches. For example, when its 54 countries are united, Africa can determine many votes at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly or in other international forums. When the EU and the African Union (AU) act as partners, as it was for the Paris Agreement, they orient global policies. Against this backdrop, a paramount way to partner with Africa is to support reforms of some international bodies such as the UN Security Council in order to include a permanent seat for African representatives or reforms within the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

³ Today’s numbers are alarming: according to a report from the United Nations and the African Union, nearly 282 million people (about 20 per cent of the African population) are currently undernourished, marking an increase of 57 million compared to the beginning of the pandemic (FAO et al. 2023: 5). Yet, The UN’s 2024 inter-agency aid plans for Sudan, Ethiopia and the DRC are currently only 3.6, 2.1, and 14.1 per cent, funded, respectively.

In 2023, the African engagement on peace and security abroad emerged in some scenarios. For example, an African delegation of seven chiefs of states travelled for a peace mediation to Ukraine and Russia in June 2023. Beyond the very limited success of the mission (but many mediators share the same fate), it was the first time that such a robust delegation worked on a peace process out of Africa. In the same war, the Black Sea Grain Initiative showed how African countries can play a global role, for instance when some of them mentioned that they do not want to be “beneficiaries” of Russian aid on grain, but to guarantee their own food security. Also, in late December 2023 South Africa asked the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to consider whether Israel was committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. Meanwhile South Africa provided its back channels and connections to open the negotiation with Hamas. Finally, Ethiopia and Egypt joined the G20 amplifying African voice in those fora.

2. Power, leadership and interlocutors in the African continent

2.1 Cracks within regional organisations

Africa’s conflicts and military coups have come hand in hand with a weakening of regional cooperation. The continent is full of regional initiatives from the West to the East, dealing with monetary, economic and security issues. Yet, the Sahel region is a good example to demonstrate the need to reform the functioning of the regional organization – such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Since the 1990s, ECOWAS has expanded its role beyond economic matters to include military support, mediation, and peacebuilding. However, recent military coups in member states like Burkina Faso and Mali have exposed its inability to prevent such actions despite imposing sanctions. Mali faced heavy diplomatic and economic sanctions from ECOWAS after a proposed transition, leading to protests against ECOWAS perceived as manipulated by external powers, particularly France. ECOWAS’s response to unconstitutional changes has been inconsistent, evident in its forceful intervention in Gambia in 2017 but silence on similar issues in Guinea. This inconsistency stems partly from the organization’s structure, which includes officials holding national government positions, leading to prioritization of national interests over protocol principles. This was evident in the differential treatment of Mali and Niger in comparison to Burkina Faso, possibly influenced by Côte d’Ivoire’s need to cooperate with Ouagadougou in counterterrorism efforts along their shared border (Caruso and Lenzi 2023). However, the dissatisfaction within ECOWAS brought Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso to withdraw from the economic bloc in January 2024 (Caruso 2024: 12). To a lesser extent, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) is also experiencing fractures in itself and difficulties in addressing major conflicts in Sudan and South Sudan (Mutambo et al. 2023). Such fractures within regional blocs on the one hand reduce the possibility of resolving crises, on the other hand, they make it more difficult for external interlocutors – as in this case the G7 – to understand with whom to interact.

2.2 Is the African Union representing Africa?

The African Union has gained relevance by representing all African countries and dealing with complex challenges, from peace and security to climate change. By providing a platform for African nations to collectively address security challenges, the AU has the ambition to play a pivotal role in advancing peace and stability across the continent. At this aim, the AU has developed a robust framework for addressing conflicts and fostering peacebuilding efforts. Through mechanisms such as the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), the AU has demonstrated its commitment to engaging in conflict prevention and resolution. The AU has also taken proactive steps to champion African priorities in international forums such as the United Nations and the G7, amplifying the voices of African nations on issues ranging from climate change to global health crises.

Yet, is the AU truly representing African people and countries? The current tensions between the AU and some regional organizations are not heading in this direction. The AU has made significant strides in representing African interests on the global stage. For example, in September 2023 the AU was invited as a permanent full member status member of the G20, upgrading its status from “invited international organisation” to this decision gave the AU the same status as the EU, which sits alongside 19 countries (Munyati 2023). At the internal level, the question of whether it fully represents the diverse array of voices and needs within Africa remains pertinent. For instance, some internal mechanisms have been showing AU’s reliance on a few dominant member states such as Ethiopia or Kenya, can skew decision-making processes and hinder equitable representation (Dersso 2023). In this framework, the G20 membership offers the opportunity to strengthen continental cooperation at the AU level through two processes. Firstly, the representation at the G20 summit level is for the rotating Chairperson of the Union assisted by the AU Commission Chairperson reflecting the current practice of AU’s participation in G20 based on invitation. However, this representation should be supported by an effective representation of the AU in ministerial, central bank, G20 Finance Track, and Sherpa Track meetings to secure the continent’s interests within the club.

2.3 Looking for interlocutors

Although the ideal would be to have the African Union as interlocutor, the G7 should also consider forging relationships with countries that not only have a bearing on security issues on the continent, but also push for an Africa’s role at the global level. Senegal and South Africa might be a good example in this respect. Pretoria, for instance, as one of Africa’s largest economies and a regional powerhouse also plays a leading role in diplomatic efforts to resolve conflicts and promote peace. It participates in regional organizations such as the African Union and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), using its influence to mediate disputes and facilitate negotiations. But also contributes troops to various peacekeeping missions in order to

stabilize conflict zones in countries like the DRC, Sudan (Darfur), and South Sudan. At the global level, together with Senegal, Comoros and Zambia, South Africa presented the Africa Peace Initiative for Ukraine (Khadiagala 2023). Lastly, Pretoria's action to support the ICC's mandate to investigate alleged war crimes in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict underlines its commitment to upholding international law, promoting human rights, and seeking accountability for alleged violations, irrespective of the parties involved.

G7 members should target not only like-minded countries such as Kenya that thanks to its strategic location and role as a regional hub for diplomacy, trade, and finance make it an important partner for the G7 in addressing security threats and promoting economic development in East Africa. But also those that aspire to have a multitude of allies such as Central Africa Republic (CAR). Although CAR is mostly an isolated and poor country, it is an example of cohabitation of external powers such as Russia, the United States and the EU. Contrary to the Sahel, the arrival of Russia did not cut the ties between the country and the West. Furthermore, the G7 countries should take into consideration those countries that want to play a role in the continent security but are also undergoing deep economic constraints – especially related to external debt such as Ethiopia. As the second-most populous country in Africa and a regional leader in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia's stability is critical for the continent's security and development. Lastly, the G7 should also liaise with interlocutors that have tried to strengthen AU's role in the continent. Rwanda, for instance, has played a significant role in strengthening the AU by actively participating in its various initiatives and advocating for reforms aimed at enhancing the organization's effectiveness. At the same time, Rwanda represents an interesting perspective for the G7 as in recent years it has both sought to attract investment and development assistance with Western partners, and expressed interest in Russian investment in key sectors such as energy, infrastructure, and mining.

2.4 G7 and Africa: Lost in translation?

In the last 25 years, Africa has gained more relevance in the agenda of the G7 summits. In 2000, the G8's Japanese Presidency invited South Africa, Senegal, Algeria and Nigeria. In 2002, the Canadian Presidency invited the leaders of Nigeria, Senegal and Algeria to work with the G8 leaders at the Africa Action Plan. During the 2005 G8 Summit in Scotland, the United Kingdom invited the African Union for the first time, along with Ethiopia and Tanzania. During the 2022 Elmau Summit, the G7 made commitments to support Africa in areas such as energy, food and agriculture, development, infrastructure, regional security, crime, and corruption with the presence of South Africa and Senegal.

During the Japanese Presidency in 2023, only the AU had a seat at the table represented by Comoros, invited as the AU's chair. Despite the G7 was trying to involve what many call the "Global South" especially in relation to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the guest lists seemed heading in another direction.

Overall, has been Africa able to go beyond the stage and good intentions at G7 Summits? During the Italy-Africa summit in February 2024, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni stated that the African continent will have a place of honour on the agenda of Italy's presidency of the G7 in 2024 (Italian Government 2024). Deeper cooperation between the G7 and African leaders can be fruitful in several areas, specifically climate change, peace processes, economic inequalities and fighting the global illicit economy. Now it is time to see what Italy's declarations mean in practice and if this statement will go beyond stage and good intentions.

Conclusion and recommendations to the G7

Africa's involvement and engagement in global affairs, particularly within the context of the G7, hold significant potential for addressing key peace and security challenges. The inclusion of African leading countries and organizations in discussions within the G7 can offer fresh perspectives, innovative solutions, and a more comprehensive understanding of global issues. However, the effectiveness of this engagement will depend on tangible actions and concrete steps taken by both the G7 and African leaders. The G7 should prioritize meaningful collaboration with African counterparts, leveraging Africa's growing political weight, demographic dividend, and abundant natural resources to foster peace, stability, and sustainable development on both regional and global scales. By working together, the G7 and African leaders can build a more resilient and inclusive global order that benefits all nations.

Recommendations:

- *Enhance dialogue and cooperation:* The G7 should actively seek input and participation from African countries and organizations in discussions on global challenges, ensuring that diverse perspectives are represented and considered in decision-making processes.
- *Support African-led initiatives:* The G7 should provide political, financial, and technical support to African-led initiatives aimed at promoting peace, security, and development on the continent, aligning their efforts with Africa's own priorities and strategies.
- *Strengthen multilateral partnerships:* The G7 should collaborate closely with regional organizations such as the African Union and ECOWAS to strengthen multilateral approaches to conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and crisis management in Africa, leveraging existing mechanisms and expertise.

References

Caruso, Francesca, ed. 2024. Conflict and unconstitutional change of government in Africa: Is there still a role for the EU-AU partnership? *ETTG Collective Reports 1/2024*. <https://wp.me/p9qfAP-1Jc>

Caruso, Francesca, and Lenzi, Francesca. 2023. The Sahel region: a litmus test for EU–Africa relations in a changing global order. *FEPS Policy Papers* June. <https://feps-europe.eu/?p=64048>

Dersso, Solomon Ayele. 2023. Why African Union’s membership in the G20 matters for both the G20 and Africa. *Ideas Indaba* 11 September. <https://amaniafrica-et.org/?p=15780>

FAO et al. 2023. *Africa - Regional overview of food security and nutrition 2023*. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc8743en>

Gleixner-Hayat, Brittany. 2023. Ethiopia’s fragile stability remains at risk. *Carnegie Commentaries* 1 November. <https://carnegieendowment.org/publications/90895>

Italian Government. 2024. *President Meloni’s opening address at the Italia-Africa Summit*. 29 January. <https://www.governo.it/en/node/24861>

Khadiagala, Gilbert. 2023. An African peace initiative in the Russia-Ukraine war? *PRIF Blog* 21 July. <https://blog.prif.org/?p=8680>

Munyati, Chido. 2023. The African Union has been made a permanent member of the G20 – what does it mean for the continent? *Geographies in Depth* 14 September. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/09/african-union-g20-world-leaders>

Mutambo, Aggrey, Oluoch, Fred, and Abdallatif, Mawahib. 2023. IGAD reform hits first bump over Sudan war as mistrust erupts. *The East-African* 17 June. <https://www.theeastafrikan.co.ke/tea/rest-of-africa/igad-reform-hits-first-bump-over-sudan-war-as-mistrust-erupts-4273556>

Statista. 2023. *BRICS and G7 countries’ share of the world’s total gross domestic product (GDP) in purchasing power parity (PPP) from 2000 to 2023*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1412425>

About Think7

Think7 (T7) is the official think tank engagement group of the Group of 7 (G7). It provides research-based policy recommendations for G7 countries and partners. The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI) are the co-chairs of T7 under Italy’s 2024 G7 presidency.