

Revitalising APSA to Protect Regional Integration

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Executive Summary

The Pan-African Alliance for Peace, Integration and Regional Security (PAIRS) advocates urgent reforms to the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). Rising, overlapping conflicts across the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo are undermining regional integration: borders close, trade routes collapse and local economies suffer. This briefing documents core failures in early warning, institutional coordination, operational capacity and diplomatic engagement, and proposes four structural reforms with concrete actions to restore rapid, African-led prevention, mediation and peace operations.

Background and purpose

True regional integration - the free movement of people, goods and services - requires a baseline of safety and political trust. Recent conflict trends and the suspension of several AU member states after unconstitutional changes of government have weakened continental coherence. This briefing synthesises PAIRS' institutional mapping and proposes pragmatic reforms to ensure APSA can prevent and contain cross-border crises and protect continental integration objectives.

1. The core challenge

- Overlapping, transnational conflicts are spreading across fragile borders (Sahel, Horn of Africa, eastern DRC), increasing the risk of regional destabilisation.
- Unconstitutional changes of government and state suspensions have eroded continental diplomatic channels.
- Existing security systems are slow to translate early warnings into preventive political or operational responses, putting trade, livelihoods and integration at risk.

2. Key drivers of failure

- Slow preventive action: Early warning information seldom triggers timely political or diplomatic intervention.

- Institutional overlap and ambiguity: Mandates and response thresholds between AU organs and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are unclear, producing competition and delay.
- External dependency: Peace operations remain heavily reliant on foreign finance, logistics and equipment, limiting speed, sovereignty and local ownership.
- Fractured dialogue: Suspended or isolated states are often excluded from continent-wide engagement, closing diplomatic avenues for de-escalation.

3. Strategic recommendations (four pillars)

A. Turn warnings into swift action

- Connect CEWS (Continental Early Warning System) to a designated rapid-decision mechanism at the AU/RECs level with clear escalation timelines (e.g., 72-hour political assessment; 14-day preventive deployment options).
- Create a dedicated, replenishable Conflict Prevention Fund (CPF) within the AU with pre-approved disbursement rules for rapid, small-scale interventions (mediation support, targeted logistics, protection of trade corridors).

B. Professionalise peace mediation

- Establish a standing African Mediation Corps: a roster of accredited mediators drawn from respected regional figures, civil society leaders and grassroots peace practitioners, with continuous training, rapid-deployment contracts and logistical support.
- Institutionalise community-level engagement as a core mediation strand to complement high-level diplomacy and prevent local tensions from escalating.

C. Standardise and de-risk peace operations

- Build shared continental logistics: pooled transport hubs, interoperable airlift arrangements and joint procurement frameworks to reduce reliance on external suppliers.
- Create a continental intelligence-sharing platform with strict data-protection and human-rights safeguards to improve situational awareness.
- Apply binding human-rights and gender-inclusion standards for all missions; integrate gender advisors and protection officers by default.

D. Clarify institutional roles and re-open dialogue

- Adopt a first-responder matrix that assigns lead roles by geography and capability (RECs as proximate responders; AU as coordinator and strategic backstop), with pre-agreed support modalities to avoid mandate conflicts.
- Reopen non-conditional diplomatic channels with isolated or suspended states to enable confidential dialogue, confidence-building and gradual reintegration where possible.

4. Implementation roadmap (high-level)

- Phase 1 (0-6 months): Establish CPF governance rules; agree rapid-decision protocol linking CEWS to AU/REC political bodies; begin mediator roster accreditation.
- Phase 2 (6-18 months): Launch pilot pooled logistics hubs and an intelligence-sharing pilot; operationalise mediation corps in two priority regions.
- Phase 3 (18-36 months): Scale logistics and mediation capacity continent-wide; formal adoption of first-responder matrix by AU Assembly; evaluate and adjust CPF and protocols.

5. Institutional responsibilities and partners

- African Union: lead coordinator, host of CPF, custodian of CEWS linkage and first-responder matrix.
- Regional Economic Communities (ECOWAS, SADC, IGAD, ECCAS, etc.): first responders in their areas, hosts for mediation teams and logistics hubs.
- Member states: financial contributors to CPF, providers of assets for pooled logistics, participants in mediator roster.
- Civil society and grassroots actors: local mediation, prevention programming and community trust-building.
- International partners: technical and transitional support, conditional on strengthening African ownership and capacity transfer plans.

6. Monitoring, evaluation and accountability

- Define clear indicators: time from CEWS alert to political assessment; CPF disbursement timelines; mediator deployment lead times; logistics response times; mission compliance with human-rights and gender benchmarks.
- Quarterly reporting to AU Assembly and public annual audits of CPF and pooled assets.
- Independent mid-term evaluation at 18 months with recommendations for scale or course correction.

7. Budgetary considerations (indicative)

- Seed CPF and mediator corps training (first 12 months): modest initial capital required; exact figures to be determined through member state consultations and burden-sharing modalities. (PAIRS can support a costing exercise on request.)

Conclusion

Regional integration and continental prosperity depend on restoring fast, African-led prevention, mediation and operational readiness. Implementing the four structural reforms proposed here will reduce the time between warning and action, strengthen local ownership of peace operations, and protect the economic and social links that underpin regional integration. PAIRS calls on the AU, RECs, member states and civil society to adopt these measures with urgency and shared responsibility.

Signed,

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