

# Journal of African Union Studies (JoAUS)

ISSN 2050-4306 (Online) ISSN 2050-4292 (Print)

Indexed by: SCOPUS, IBSS, JSTOR, EBSCO, COPERNICUS, ERIH PLUS,  
ProQuest, J-Gate and Sabinet

Volume 15 (Number 1), April 2026

pp 5-9

## Editorial note

### AU Strategic Hedging: Managing Risk in an Age of Volatility

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2050-4306/2026/v15n1a0>

**Jideofor Adibe**

*Dept of Political Science, Nasarawa State University, Keffi*

---

## Introduction

In an era defined by intensifying Great Power competition and systemic global uncertainty, the African Union (AU) appears to have adopted a posture of what could be called ' **strategic hedging**'. This approach allows the continental body to avoid rigid binary alignments - such as choosing between the United States and China or taking a hardline position in the war between the US/Israel and Iran. In what has also been called strategic autonomy (Biscop, 2022; El Bikam, Zita, & Oumar, 2017), the AU wants enough room to maximise developmental benefits while engaging multiple global poles simultaneously.

## The Logic of Hedging in the Multipolar Order

Strategic hedging is not merely passive neutrality; it is an active risk-management technique used by middle powers and regional blocs to guard against future uncertainties. For the AU, this involves a "multi-aligned" strategy in which the continent, for instance, maintains deep economic ties with China for infrastructure and trade while continuing security cooperation with Western partners such as the U.S. and the European Union. The continental body hopes that this 'strategic hedging' will not only insulate it and its members from becoming arenas for proxy conflicts but will also help it leverage the big powers'

competition to advance the interests of its members (Mabera, 2025). In this hedging strategy, there are critical layers of volatility:

- **Geopolitical Competition:** The rivalry between major powers often pressures African states to take sides on global issues, from the conflict in Ukraine to competitions over technological standards.
- **Economic Resilience:** In a landscape of fluctuating commodity prices and currency instability, the AU seeks to promote geographic and asset diversification through initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which serves as a macro-hedge that could reduce dependence on external markets by fostering intra-African trade.
- **Security and Peacekeeping:** Faced with a rise in unconstitutional changes of government and terrorism, the AU seeks to utilise its Peace and Security Architecture to design context-sensitive responses that balance regional stability with international norms.

## **Challenges to Effective Hedging**

Despite its strategic value, the AU's ability to hedge effectively is constrained by a reliance on external partners for funding for much of its operations (Malcom, 2025). Additionally, inconsistent commitment from member states and limited managerial capacity often lead to 'under-hedging', in which the organisation fails to fully capitalise on its collective bargaining power.

As the global order becomes more unpredictable, strategic hedging appears to be one of the most viable frameworks for the AU to navigate the "security-economic disconnect." By institutionalising more cohesive diplomatic blocs, such as the A3 in the UN Security Council, the AU is gradually transitioning from a reactive entity to a proactive shaper of global norms.

Contributors to this volume explore various aspects of AU's role in this fast-changing world. In

"The AU's Hedging Strategy: Navigating U.S.-China Competition through Agenda 2063", the paper examined the African Union's (AU) strategic navigation of the geostrategic competition between the United States and China. It employed neoclassical realism to analyse how systemic pressures are mediated through continental ambitions embodied in Agenda 2063. The study makes a dual contribution: theoretically, by extending neoclassical realism to account for regional organisational behaviour, and empirically, by conceptualising Agenda 2063 as an

operational foreign policy instrument that dictates the evaluation of strategic partnerships.

The paper on 'BRICS Collaborations and Africa's Strategic Independence: Prospects, Dangers, and Compliance with Agenda 2063 Objectives' explores how Africa may interact with its BRICS partners to promote strategic autonomy and trade fairness. The paper cautions that while collaboration with BRICS presents potential for investment, infrastructure development, and knowledge sharing, it may also perpetuate neocolonial tendencies like debt accumulation, commodity reliance, and unequal power relations.

In the African Union's 'Silencing the Guns or the Guns Silencing Us? Analysing the Implications of Rising Armed Conflicts and Terrorism in Africa', the paper investigates the rising profile of armed conflict and terrorist insurgency groups in Africa against the AU's 'Silencing the Guns' target by 2030. The paper examined the AU's 2063 Agenda, which necessitated silencing the guns as a flagship project. Using the security theory, it examines the premise of the 2063 Agenda, which argues that, though the 'Silencing the Guns' project has recorded some successes, the rise in insecurity resulting from armed conflicts and terrorist insurgency continues to make 'Silencing the Guns' a mere political discussion.

The paper on 'Electrifying Southern African Development Community: The Case For Pooled Electricity Trading For Regional Development' argues that energy security remains a critical priority for sustainable development within the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and that despite continued government investments in the energy sector, electricity demand across the region is increasing faster than installed generation capacity. The paper contributes theoretically by extending supply chain perspectives to the analysis of regional electricity markets.

In 'Regional Security at a Crossroads: The Emergence of the Alliance of Sahel States', the paper posits that the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States marks a major shift in West Africa's security structure, and that it also reflects a response to the failure of counterinsurgency efforts and existing defence systems as well as a bold effort to redefine sovereignty and regional cooperation. The paper analyses the security implications of the AES's formation and evaluates its capacity to counter the growing insurgency threat in the region.

The paper on 'Beyond ECOWAS' Diplomatic Efforts: Interrogating Niger Republic Military Coup', interrogates the 2023 military coup in the Niger Republic and argues that regionally, the coup not only dented the

reputation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), but also accentuated the failures of ECOWAS in adopting a more robust preventive approach to coups d'état.

In 'Assessing the Effectiveness of the African Union's Peace and Security Mechanisms in Managing Armed Conflicts in the Sahel', the paper examined the effectiveness of the African Union's Peace and Security Mechanisms in managing armed conflicts in the Sahel, a region increasingly characterized by terrorism, insurgencies, inter-communal violence and unconstitutional changes of government, amid the exacerbating effects of climate change. The paper concluded that there is a need to strengthen the African Union's interventions through sustainable financing, enhanced political commitment among member states, promotion of local ownership of peace processes, and fostering of deeper collaboration with regional and international partners.

In 'Investigating African Union's Adoption of Anti-Human Trafficking Communication Strategies among Vulnerable Female Teenagers in the South West Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria', the paper found that the African Union raises awareness about the evils of human trafficking among teenage girls through public and interpersonal communication systems, and that globalisation is partly responsible for human trafficking in the South-West geo-political zone of Nigeria.

In 'From Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding: Evaluating the African Union Transition Mission (ATMIS) in Somalia', the paper posed the question of whether the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) has effectively bridged peacekeeping and peacebuilding, and if so, what gaps must be addressed to avoid a post-drawdown security setback.

The paper on 'Implementing the SADC Strategy for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (2019-2030) in South Africa: Progress, Prospects and Challenges' draws upon a diverse range of secondary data sources—including government reports, publications from international organisations, media reports, and peer-reviewed journal articles to evaluate South Africa's progress toward the SADC SRHR (2019–2030) targets. Its findings show that while South Africa is making significant headway in facilitating access to some SRR and SRH services, these are insufficient not only for the country to attain the 2030 targets set in the SADC SRHR (2019-2030), but also for it to attain the UN SDG 3 and SDG 5 targets.

In 'ECOWAS 1998 Transhumance Protocol: A Multi-Level Governance Theory on Herders' Migration And Farmer–Herder Conflict

In Benue State, Nigeria, the paper argues that though the Protocol was designed to regulate cross-border pastoral mobility, among other objectives, farmer–herder conflicts have persisted across Nigeria's Middle Belt, particularly in Benue State, the nation's food basket. The paper contends that conflicts escalate when regional provisions are misaligned with local enforcement and ecological pressures.

In 'AfCFTA as a Catalyst for Intra-African Trade, Regional Integration and Economic Development: A Gravity Model Approach', the paper conducts an empirical analysis of the relationship between intra-African trade, regional integration, and economic development in Sub-Saharan Africa. The study proposes that policymakers should focus on prudent policies to promote intra-African trade, regional economic expansion, integration, and cooperation through the AfCFTA.

The paper on 'Common Currency in the EAC: An OCA-Based Comparative Analysis of WAEMU and the Eurozone', examines the feasibility of adopting a common currency in the East African Community (EAC) using a comparative institutional framework grounded in Optimum Currency Area (OCA) theory and an Afrocentric perspective on regional integration. It concludes that a viable EAC Monetary Union requires a phased approach that prioritises convergence, enforcement credibility, and sustained political commitment.

Overall, we believe that this issue of the journal has brought together very exciting insights about the AU's dynamic role in a global landscape that has become not only more fragmented but also increasingly unpredictable.

## References

- Bakwesegha, Martha (2025, July 15). Overcoming challenges to reform the African Union. Africa Centre for Strategic Studies. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/overcoming-challenges-to-implement-the-african-unions-reforms/>
- Biscop, Sven (2022, January 13). Strategic autonomy: not without integration. Foundation for European Progressive Studies, <https://feps-europe.eu/publication/840-strategic-autonomy-not-without-integration/>
- El Bikam, Abdelkhalek Zita, Afang Ndong Oumar, Kourouma (2017, August 25), African Union: What are the possible options for strategic autonomy? Policy Centre for the New South,