

A study on the transformation of security governance models in Africa driven by a "sense of community": a case study of counterterrorism in Somalia

Yaxuan Shi

Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, China

Audery2020@163.com

Abstract. Based on the pluralistic security community theory, this paper attempts to analyze the deep-seated drivers behind the transformation of Africa's security governance model. Long plagued by the interweaving of traditional and non-traditional security threats, Africa gradually broke away from the "state-led + external dependence" governance model after the Cold War and shifted toward regional autonomous and collaborative governance. Taking the Somali counter-terrorism as a case, Africa has gradually achieved an autonomous transformation of its security governance model, yet the academic community lacks a systematic explanation for this phenomenon. Employing the "three-step ladder" analytical framework within the pluralistic security community theory, this study identifies the "sense of community" as one of the key driving factors for Africa's security governance transformation. The urgency of collective action caused by transnational security threats, the enhanced practical feasibility through institutional construction such as the African Peace and Security Architecture, and the collective identity fostered by Pan-Africanism and the Agenda 2063 jointly constitute the "sense of community" among African countries, thereby generating the driving force for transformation. This transformation has been consolidated through practical cooperation, mutual benefit sharing, and the normative evolution from "non-interference" to "non-indifference." From the perspective of pluralistic security community, this paper will examine whether counterterrorism efforts in Somalia align with the logic of the shifting paradigm in African security governance.

Keywords: pluralistic security community, African security governance, sense of community, AU, transformation drivers

1. Introduction

Africa has long been entangled in highly intricate and multi-faceted security governance challenges. Driven by a confluence of factors—including underdeveloped governance frameworks, volatile internal social and political dynamics, deep-rooted historical legacies, and complex external geopolitical maneuvering—the security environment across the African continent has remained in a state of persistent turbulence for decades. The security predicaments afflicting Africa are diverse and mutually reinforcing, encompassing not only traditional security issues such as frequent regime transitions, large-scale armed conflicts, and entrenched

ethnic separatism, but also the rampant spread of transnational terrorism, climate-induced resource scarcity, and cross-border refugee crises. These intertwined crises have created an urgent imperative for the establishment of a comprehensive, binding, and regionally tailored security governance framework to address emerging challenges effectively.

Profound paradigm shifts have reshaped Africa's security governance model before and after the Cold War. During the Cold War era, security governance on the continent was centered on sovereign states, with the principle of "non-interference in internal affairs" serving as the cornerstone of inter-state relations. Regional organizations, such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU), played a marginal role limited to conflict mediation, lacking the institutional mandate, financial resources, and operational capacity to tackle transnational non-traditional security threats like cross-border terrorism. In the post-Cold War period, the revival of Pan-Africanism and the establishment of the African Union (AU) in 2002 marked a pivotal turning point. Africa gradually constructed a regional security architecture anchored in the principle of "collective security," with mechanisms such as the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), the African Standby Force (ASF), and sub-regional economic communities (e.g., ECOWAS, IGAD) assuming increasingly prominent roles in counter-terrorism and crisis management. A paradigmatic example of this shift is the deployment of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in 2007, whose operational launch heralded a new era of African-owned and African-led counter-terrorism governance—one that prioritized regional autonomy over external dependence.

To date, existing scholarship on African security governance has predominantly focused on the institutional architecture of traditional security management, with a strong emphasis on realist perspectives that prioritize state sovereignty, military conflicts, and post-conflict reconstruction. However, these studies have overlooked a critical research gap: the underlying motivations driving Africa's proactive pursuit of autonomy in governing non-traditional security issues. Against this backdrop, this paper aims to address two core research questions: First, what are the deep-seated driving forces that have prompted Africa to transform its security governance model in the context of counter-terrorism? Second, amid the growing complexity of security challenges, what factors have incentivized Africa to take proactive responsibility and pursue independent governance pathways in the realm of non-traditional security?

2. Research status of African security governance

In recent years, scholarly research on African security governance has primarily revolved around core actors such as sovereign states, regional organizations, and external powers. As non-traditional security threats have surged in frequency and intensity, many transnational challenges have transcended national boundaries, necessitating collective responses within the framework of regional and international organizations. Among these actors, the African Union (AU) has emerged as a key driver and coordinator in Africa's security and conflict resolution processes, leveraging its institutional mandate to promote regional cohesion and collective action. Existing literature can be categorized into three main research dimensions:

First, research on the construction of Africa's security governance model has focused on the development of the continental-level "African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)." Following the launch of the AU's Agenda 2063—a long-term development framework outlining Africa's vision for prosperity, integration, and self-determination—the AU has systematically integrated development, security, and governance agendas, striving to build a more rational, efficient, and cohesive regional security governance architecture [1]. This architecture encompasses a range of interconnected mechanisms, including the PSC, the ASF, and the Panel of the Wise, designed to provide a comprehensive response to security crises. In terms of operational models for

security actions, scholarly attention has centered on the collaborative interactions between indigenous regional organizations and sovereign states [2]. These interactions unfold within a complex network of actors, including the United Nations (which provides authorization and financial support), sub-regional organizations (e.g., the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)), regional powers (e.g., South Africa, Nigeria, Ethiopia), and external major powers (e.g., the United States, France, China, Russia) [3]. Africa's traditional security governance model was characterized by "state-led governance with external coordination." While this model addressed critical gaps such as funding shortages and institutional deficiencies in African security governance, excessive reliance on external actors often relegated regional organizations to a passive position, undermining their autonomy as core governance subjects and limiting their ability to set agendas aligned with African priorities.

Second, research on the transformation of African security governance has explored shifts in governance domains, models, and concepts in response to evolving security dynamics. In terms of the expansion of governance domains, the scope of security governance has broadened from traditional state-centric concerns—such as inter-state wars and regime stability—to encompass non-traditional issues, including terrorism, climate change-induced resource conflicts, large-scale refugee resettlement, and public health emergencies [4]. However, this expansion has posed significant challenges to the compatibility of existing institutional frameworks, which were originally designed to address traditional security threats. Africa's long-term dependence on financial resources, technical support, and institutional platforms from Western countries (e.g., the European Union) and international organizations has constrained its autonomy in setting agendas and formulating policies in the security governance realm [5]. In terms of governance models, Africa has undergone a gradual transition from reliance on external intervention to regional autonomy and collaborative governance. In 1994, the Ghanaian-American scholar George Ayittey proposed the concept of "solving African problems in an African way," emphasizing the need to establish an effective internal conflict intervention mechanism rooted in African realities, values, and historical experiences [6]. As security challenges have evolved, the funding mechanisms and participating actors in African security governance have become increasingly diversified, with a growing number of practical cases reflecting a shift from one-way security assistance to mutually beneficial security cooperation between external actors and Africa [7]. For instance, partnerships between the AU and China, India, and other emerging powers have provided alternative sources of funding and technical support, reducing Africa's dependence on Western donors. In terms of governance concepts, Africa's adherence to the principle of "African solutions to African problems" has been accompanied by a fundamental transformation of core security norms—from "non-interference" to "non-indifference." The concept of "African solutions to African problems" traces its origins to the Pan-Africanist call by early advocate Martin Robison Delany that "Africa is for Africans" [8]. The principle of "non-interference" evolved through a phase of revitalized African national identity, transitioning to a stance of "restricting OAU intervention," until the AU replaced the OAU in 2002 and formally adopted the "non-indifference" principle. This normative shift emerged against the backdrop of reduced external aid to Africa, the failure of external interventions to resolve long-standing conflicts, and the continent's growing aspirations to independently address regional security challenges [9].

Third, theoretical research on the transformation of African security governance has drawn on mainstream international relations theories to explain the practical dilemmas and driving forces behind this transition. From a realist perspective, the weakening of U.S. and Soviet influence in Africa after the Cold War created a geopolitical vacuum, granting AU member states greater autonomy to engage in regional security cooperation and institutional building [10]. Realists argue that the reduction in great power competition has allowed African states to prioritize their collective interests over ideological divides, fostering collaboration in security

governance. From a functionalist lens, Africa's strengthened intervention in intra-regional conflicts is attributed to the escalating severity of human rights abuses and diverse security threats, which have compelled the development of protective institutional frameworks to address unmet societal needs [11]. Functionalists emphasize that regional organizations like the AU have emerged as effective vehicles for addressing transnational challenges that individual states cannot resolve in isolation. Additionally, some scholars argue that Africa's deep dependence on Western resources, coupled with the dual pressures of Western public opinion and socialization, has rendered Western-style governance norms incompatible with Africa's unique security context, thereby triggering a transformation of its governance model [12]. Constructivist scholars, by contrast, highlight the role of ideational factors—such as Pan-Africanism, collective identity, and normative change—in driving the transformation of Africa's security governance model, emphasizing that the shift from "non-interference" to "non-indifference" reflects a fundamental change in how African states perceive their mutual obligations.

Overall, existing research has predominantly focused on macro-level analyses of Africa's security governance models and institutional architectures, lacking robust meso-level theoretical frameworks to explain the process and driving forces behind the behavioral transformation of specific actors in African security governance. As a key actor in security governance, scholarly discussions on the AU have primarily centered on institutional and material factors, with insufficient explanatory power regarding the transformation of security norms. There remains a significant gap in understanding the practical manifestation of the normative shift from "non-interference" to "non-indifference" in the security realm, resulting in a disconnect between research on security norms and empirical studies on the transformation of institutional frameworks and governance systems. Furthermore, few studies have explored how the interplay between material factors (e.g., resource constraints, external intervention) and ideational factors (e.g., collective identity, Pan-Africanism) has shaped Africa's pursuit of autonomy in non-traditional security governance.

3. Core concepts and theoretical framework

This section outlines the theoretical framework of this paper, which will focus on applying the theory of pluralistic security communities, particularly analyzing the role of the sense of "community" as a variable in the transformation of security governance models. Based on the literature review and existing perspectives on security community theory, prior research on state or group behavior has concentrated primarily on the material and institutional levels, but is not suitable for explaining exceptional cases in the handling of non-traditional security incidents. The concept of the "security community" was first proposed by Richard Waugenren and later expanded upon by Karl Deutsch, Adler, and others. It has evolved from a theory of collective action originally limited to traditional capabilities such as military and fiscal capacity to a theory that encompasses the realm of identity construction. Among these, the "plural security community"—as opposed to the "integrated security community," which arises from the transfer of sovereignty—involves a more complex definition and formation process and is better suited to explaining the behavior of intergovernmental organizations in current regionalism studies. As an intergovernmental actor with a high degree of autonomy in regional studies, the African Union (AU) has adopted measures in addressing non-traditional security issues—such as those involving national sovereignty—that are difficult to explain using traditional security community theory. Therefore, this paper will review existing concepts, introduce innovations, and reapply relevant theories to explain these exceptional cases.

3.1. Core concepts

A security community is defined as "a human group that has achieved 'integration.'" Here, "integration" refers to the formation of a strong and widely shared sense of "community," as well as corresponding institutions and practices, among all residents in a specific region—characterized by a reliable expectation of "peaceful change" and a long-term conviction in the sustainability of such change. The "sense of community" is manifested in two key dimensions: the consistency of core values (including constitutionalism, democracy, and liberal economic principles) and shared reactivity (encompassing mutual sympathy and loyalty, a collective "we-feeling," common confidence and considerations, partial identification with shared self-images and interests, and the ability to predict each other's behaviors and act accordingly) [13].

The concept of a security community was first proposed by the Western scholar Richard W. Van Wagenen, who defined it as a stable community composed of multiple political entities that consciously renounce the use of force in their mutual relations [14]. Subsequently, Karl W. Deutsch redefined the concept and developed it into a systematic theoretical framework for security studies, conceptualizing a security community as a fully integrated human group bound by shared values, mutual trust, and regular interaction. Deutsch emphasized that communication and social interaction are critical drivers of community formation, as they foster mutual understanding and predictable behavior among members. In the 1990s, Emmanuel Adler and Michael Barnett further refined the concept in their seminal work, redefining a security community as a transnational region composed of sovereign states whose people hold a reliable expectation of peaceful change. They categorized security communities into two types—"pluralistic" and "amalgamated"—and reconstructed the theory into a three-stage model: the nascent stage (characterized by limited interaction and low trust), the ascending stage (marked by increased collaboration and emerging shared identity), and the mature stage (defined by deep trust and institutionalized cooperation) [15].

This paper employs Karl W. Deutsch's theory of the "sense of community" and draws on the environmental analysis mechanism of the "pluralistic security community" proposed by constructivist scholars such as Emmanuel Adler to explain the driving forces behind the transformation of Africa's security governance model. Adler and his collaborators redefined a "pluralistic security community" as "a transnational region composed of sovereign states whose people maintain a reliable expectation of peaceful change." This definition encompasses three core characteristics: first, members share a common identity, values, and intentions; second, members engage in direct, multi-faceted connections and interactions across political, economic, and social domains; third, the community demonstrates reciprocity derived from face-to-face interactions, manifested through long-term interest alignment and a certain degree of altruism. The distinguishing feature of a pluralistic security community, as opposed to traditional security communities, lies in the "sense of community"—a psychological identification with the community that transcends material and institutional factors. Unlike amalgamated security communities, which involve a high degree of political integration (e.g., a federal state), pluralistic security communities preserve the sovereignty of individual member states while fostering collective action through shared identity and mutual trust [16].

3.2. Theoretical framework

The transformation of Africa's security governance model is primarily reflected in the shift of dominant actors from sovereign states to regional organizations, with the autonomy demonstrated in security governance aligning closely with the security framework encapsulated in the concept of a "pluralistic security community." This paper utilizes the "three-step ladder" framework to analyze changes in Africa's security environment and construct an impact pathway, which in turn has become the primary driver of the transformation of Africa's security governance model.

First, we analyze the environmental changes preceding and following the transformation of Africa's governance model. From the perspective of the "three-step ladder," transformative changes in Africa's basic conditions are manifested in the rapid spread of non-traditional security threats, particularly the rampant terrorism in regions such as the Sahel, Lake Chad, and Somalia. These threats have transcended national borders, affecting multiple countries simultaneously and creating a shared sense of vulnerability among African states. The subsequent challenges of refugee resettlement, humanitarian relief, and economic disruption have, in practical terms, served as a catalyst for Africa to strengthen its security governance efforts, as individual states have recognized their inability to address these transnational threats in isolation.

In terms of process and structural variables, the hierarchical development of the "African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)" has accelerated the establishment of knowledge-sharing and resource-mutual assistance mechanisms on security issues among the AU and its member states. The PSC, in particular, has played a critical role in coordinating regional responses to security crises, providing a platform for member states to exchange information, formulate joint strategies, and allocate resources. Additionally, the development of sub-regional cooperation mechanisms—such as ECOWAS's peacekeeping operations and IGAD's counter-terrorism initiatives—has enhanced the operational capacity of African regional organizations, making collective action more feasible.

In terms of mutual communication and collective identity, the concept of a "Community of Shared Future for Africa" has become increasingly embedded in the governance philosophies of African sovereign states. This concept emphasizes the interdependence of African nations in matters of security and development, resonating with the vision of Pan-Africanism to build a united and self-reliant Africa. Combined with the vision outlined in the AU's Agenda 2063—to build a "prosperous, peaceful, and integrated Africa led by Africans themselves"—this grand development vision has become a key factor in fostering a "sense of community" among African nations. The shared experience of colonialism, the struggle for independence, and the resistance against external interference have enabled African nations to transcend a state-centric perspective and, as members of the AU, strengthen their sense of identity and cohesion with regional organizations such as the AU.

In essence, the "sense of community" among African countries stems from three interconnected sources: First, the growing prevalence and complexity of cross-border security threats, coupled with limited relief resources and escalating governance costs, have forced African countries to transcend national boundaries and engage in collective action. Second, enhanced cross-border economic and technological exchanges have promoted greater platform interoperability, while the improvement of security mechanisms and institutional design has restored African countries' confidence in their governance capabilities. Simultaneously, the weakening of external intervention has created opportunities for the transfer of power to the AU, holding the potential to enhance collective governance capacity. Third, past collective security actions and governance practices—such as the successful resolution of regional conflicts and joint responses to humanitarian crises—have strengthened mutual trust among African countries, fostering the collective identity of the "African Community with a Shared Future" and encouraging African nations to engage in security governance and humanitarian relief with a positive, mutually beneficial, and reciprocal mindset. As shown in Figure 1, the background, process and structural variables, and identity construction the urgency and feasibility of paradigm shift, and emotional motivation, thereby facilitating the transformation of security governance models in Africa.

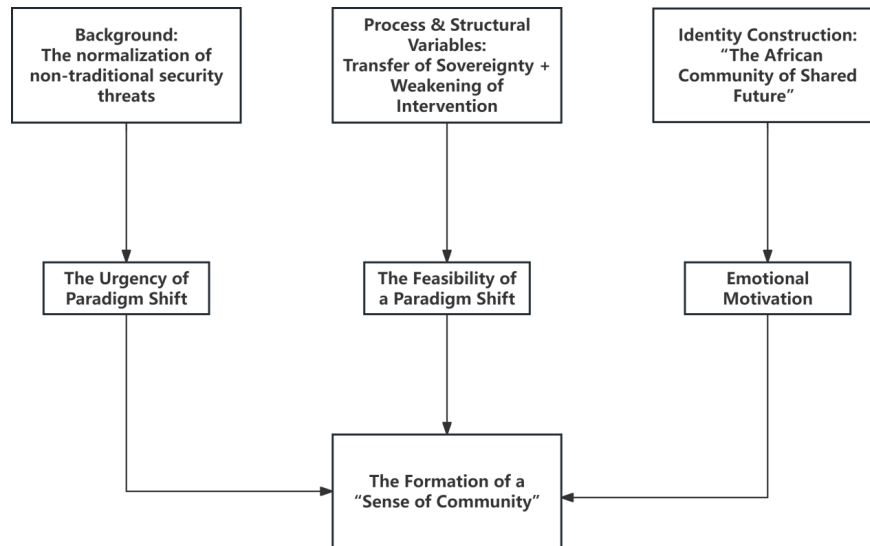


Figure 1. Diagram illustrating the logic behind the transformation of Africa's security governance models driven by a "sense of community"

4. Case verification

This paper selects the Somali counter-terrorism case to verify the transformation of Africa's security model. Against the backdrop of the normalization of non-traditional security threats in Africa, the continent's collective security practices offer profound insights into the accumulation of the "African sense of community" and its guiding role in shaping collective security actions. Somalia has long been regarded as one of the most volatile regions in Africa, with persistent terrorism, state fragility, and humanitarian crises making it a critical test case for Africa's security governance transformation. In this case, the accumulation of the "sense of community" is primarily manifested in three dimensions: the collective actions of African countries, the mutually beneficial relationship of "crisis-sharing and interest-sharing," the strengthening of African collective identity under the banner of Pan-Africanism.

First, the destructive and persistent nature of terrorist activities in Somalia reflects the expansion of African security threats from traditional to non-traditional domains, compelling African countries to break national boundaries and unite their collective forces to implement suppression and governance measures. Since 1991, Somalia has grappled with the dual challenges of counter-terrorism and national reconstruction, following the collapse of the Siad Barre regime. The primary threat emanates from the terrorist organization Al-Shabaab, which has carried out countless attacks on civilian populations, government institutions, and international aid organizations, causing widespread death and displacement. This crisis has not been confined to Somalia's borders; Al-Shabaab has launched cross-border attacks in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, targeting shopping malls, hotels, and public transportation systems. For example, the 2013 Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi, Kenya, which killed 67 people, and the 2010 Kampala bombings in Uganda, which claimed 74 lives, demonstrated the regional implications of Somalia's security crisis. These attacks have created a shared sense of vulnerability among African states, highlighting the need for collective action to address the transnational nature of the threat. During this period, Somalia's security governance has been jointly led by the Somali government and AU member states, with the establishment of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to operate under the authorization of the United Nations Security Council (Resolution 1744). This initiative represents a significant breakthrough for African countries in transcending the principle of "non-

interference in internal affairs" and stands as a paradigmatic example of AU-led, independently organized, and implemented security governance under UN mandate. The formal establishment of AMISOM in 2007, with the active participation of 15 African countries—including Uganda, Burundi, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti—in the counter-terrorism process, underscores the high degree of consensus achieved among African nations in the field of security governance and marks the initial formation of a "sense of community" [7].

Second, the sustainability of Somalia's counter-terrorism governance highlights the gradual formation of a mutually beneficial relationship of "crisis-sharing and interest-sharing" among African countries. The development of this relationship is reflected in changes in both structural and process variables. In terms of structural variables, the reduction in major power competition in Africa following the Cold War has afforded African countries greater autonomy to govern intra-regional security issues. Additionally, shifts in the global balance of power, combined with the escalating economic and military expenditure burdens faced by Western countries, have necessitated adjustments to their development aid to Africa and the costs associated with troop deployments. For example, the United States and European Union have gradually reduced their direct military presence in Africa, shifting their focus to providing limited financial and technical support rather than leading security operations. Against the backdrop of the gradual withdrawal of Western intervention forces, Africa's security governance model has undergone a fundamental transition from external intervention to regional leadership [12]. Concurrently, the transformation from the OAU to the AU reflects the aspirations of African countries to reshape their indigenous security governance model—characterized by a willingness to engage in a certain degree of sovereign transfer and rely on regional international organizations to address cross-border, normalized security threats. This has increasingly become a shared consensus among African nations. According to statistics from the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the number of terrorist attacks in East Africa decreased by 35% following the deployment of AMISOM between 2007 and 2012, demonstrating the effectiveness of collective action [6]. Simultaneously, participating countries have reaped tangible benefits from their involvement in counter-terrorism governance: Uganda and Burundi have enhanced their regional influence through troop deployments, gaining greater political clout in AU decision-making processes; South Africa and Nigeria have strengthened their leading positions in African regional security governance by providing financial and technical support, solidifying their status as regional powers; and small and medium-sized countries—such as Rwanda and Tanzania—have improved their own security governance capabilities through participation in collective counter-terrorism efforts, acquiring valuable experience in peacekeeping operations and counter-insurgency tactics [17]. The formation of mutual trust and mutually beneficial relations among African countries has empowered the AU to acquire the capacity and authority to directly intervene in security crises, rendering the African "sense of community" rooted in practical interests more stable and sustainable.

Third, throughout the Somali counter-terrorism process, the AU's concept of "African solutions to African problems" has superseded traditional governance norms such as "non-interference." This normative update has fundamentally affirmed the legitimacy of the African security community and emerged as a concrete mechanism embodying Pan-Africanism and the African spirit of self-determination [12]. The AU's ability to participate as an independent actor throughout the entire Somali counter-terrorism operation directly attests to the completion of collective identity construction among African countries, with the "sense of community" manifesting in the form of Pan-Africanism. Unlike previous security operations in Africa, which were often led by external powers, the Somali counter-terrorism mission has been planned, commanded, and coordinated entirely by the AU, with minimal interference from the United Nations or external states. The AU has developed its own counter-terrorism strategy tailored to Somalia's specific context, emphasizing not only military action but also humanitarian assistance, community engagement, and post-conflict reconstruction—

reflecting a holistic approach to security governance that aligns with African values and priorities. Furthermore, African leaders frequently invoke discourses of Pan-Africanism and African autonomy in their public addresses—a practice that effectively demonstrates the growing cohesion of the AU. For example, AU chairpersons and heads of state have repeatedly emphasized that "Africa's problems require African solutions," framing the Somali counter-terrorism mission as a symbol of Africa's ability to govern its own affairs. This rhetoric has resonated with African populations, fostering a sense of pride and collective identity. The collective identity of "Africa is for Africans" is gradually being strengthened, providing ideological guidance for the concrete practice of the "African Community with a Shared Future" [8]. The construction of this collective identity has elevated the African "sense of community" from the realm of practical interests to the level of ideological identification, which, as an emotional incentive, has become the core driver for African countries to pursue autonomy in African security governance.

In summary, from the establishment of AMISOM to the sustained counter-terrorism operations and logistical support provided since 2007, the Somali case demonstrates that the AU has evolved into a pluralistic security community sustained by the African "sense of community." Under the confluence of multiple factors—including the normalization of non-traditional security threats, the reduction of external intervention, the strengthening of collective identity, and the institutionalization of regional cooperation—African countries have transformed their security governance model, moving away from the "non-interference" principle and towards independently mobilizing and organizing security governance actions from within the region. This represents a significant step forward in Africa's exploration of a path towards independent management of regional security governance issues.

5. Conclusion

This paper employs the pluralistic security community theory as its analytical framework, integrating core concepts such as the "sense of community" to explain the driving forces behind the transformation of Africa's security governance model. It utilizes the AU's participation in the Somali counter-terrorism process as a case study to illustrate how this model is manifested in practice. The findings indicate that the surge in terrorist activities in Somalia constitutes one of the primary factors contributing to the normalization of non-traditional security threats. This contextual shift has provided the foundational conditions for the AU to participate in security governance as an independent actor, as African countries have recognized the need for collective action to address transnational threats that individual states cannot resolve in isolation. Concurrently, the weakening of external intervention and the catalysis of structural and process variables under conditions of sovereign transfer have facilitated the gradual accumulation of a "sense of community," with the legitimacy of the AU's participation in security governance gaining recognition from the majority of African countries. Finally, the resurgence of Pan-Africanism and the emergence of a new wave of African nationalism have strengthened the national identity and collective identity construction of African countries, serving as the spiritual expression of the pluralistic security community. The interplay of material-driven realistic incentives, institutional capacity support, and ideologically rooted identity motivation has collectively fostered the formation of the African "sense of community," thereby driving the transformation of Africa's security governance model—from fragmented to centralized governance, from low to high efficiency, and from passive to proactive engagement.

However, it is important to acknowledge that while the pluralistic security community theory offers valuable insights into Africa's national security governance model and the driving forces behind the AU's actions, it exhibits limitations in explaining internal security conflicts and disputes related to national internal

affairs in Africa. Currently, Africa's security situation remains highly complex, with diverse threats including military coups, tribal conflicts, separatist movements, and terrorist attacks. The pluralistic security community theory is often confined to interpreting security operations led by the AU, while the AU faces significant constraints in facilitating consensus among member states for security actions involving inter-state politics and sovereign issues. For example, in cases where security conflicts are rooted in historical ethnic tensions or territorial disputes between member states, the AU's ability to intervene is limited by the need to respect national sovereignty and avoid exacerbating divisions. Consequently, the pluralistic security actor theory possesses strong explanatory power only in the context of collective security actions undertaken by African countries through consultation and consensus.

Currently, security governance in Africa is being adjusted in response to the evolving security landscape, but structural issues remain. The direction of Africa's security governance transformation involves expanding the scope of security, improving institutional structures, and shifting security norms. With the increasing frequency of transnational security threats and armed conflicts, the scope of African security governance has gradually diversified. The issues of concern to AU member states are no longer limited to matters related to the territorial status of African nations; emerging issues such as cybersecurity, climate governance, and counter-terrorism have also been incorporated into the governance framework. Improvements in institutional structures are reflected in the coordinated enhancement of the African peace and security architecture and the African governance architecture, while capacity building for national governance is also emphasized to achieve democratic governance; The shift in security norms has moved from "non-intervention" to "non-indifference," with a greater focus today on "human security" and the practical applicability of norms. At the same time, the structural challenges facing Africa are accelerating the process of governance model reform. For instance, member states' governance capacities remain fragile, and their lack of authority in addressing internal conflicts undermines the AU's efficiency and capacity to participate in governance. Furthermore, divergent national governance priorities and opinions make it difficult for member states to coordinate their positions on issues involving sovereignty, while external dependencies also lead to interference in domestic affairs. Existing theoretical frameworks and research findings have yet to offer effective solutions to these challenges. Consequently, future research should focus on how to ensure the sustainability of the current security governance model, how to preserve existing achievements in security governance, and how to fundamentally address issues of external dependency while strengthening regional autonomy in the context of Africa's security governance transition.

Looking ahead, Africa's security governance model is continuously evolving and innovating in response to the escalating severity of security challenges. The governance model centered on the AU as the primary participant in addressing security issues is gradually becoming the dominant trend, with the aspirations of African countries for independent governance fully reflected in the improvement of governance mechanisms and the advancement of practical governance initiatives. As Africa's security governance models undergo reform, the regional autonomy of African nations will see a qualitative improvement. It is hoped that, in the future, African security issues will take a new turn for the better through the joint efforts of African nations.

Funding project

Beijing Foreign Studies University 2026 Student Research and Innovation Program "A Study on the Transformation of Security Governance Models in Africa Driven by a 'Sense of Community': A Case Study of Counterterrorism in Somalia", Supported by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (2026JX042)

References

- [1] Zhao, Y. T. (2025). Policy and effect analysis of the African Union promoting the construction of regional security governance system. *National Security Research*, (1), 120.
- [2] Zhang, K. (2022). Transformation and structural dilemmas of African security institutional governance. *International Forum*, (5), 113.
- [3] Hu, E. J. (2021). Peacekeeping cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union: Course, experience and problems. *African Studies*, (1), 50.
- [4] Zhang, K. (2020). African peace and security construction: South Africa's role and limitations as a regional power. *International Security Studies*, (5), 120.
- [5] Fan, J. R. (2024). Deterioration of the terrorist situation in Africa and counter-terrorism paths. *Contemporary International Relations*, (2), 72.
- [6] Ayittey, G. B. N. (1994, March 28). *The Somali crisis: Time for an African solution* (Policy Analysis No. 205). CATO Institute. <https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/somali-crisis-time-african-solution>
- [7] He, W. P., & Ling, H. (2026). Evolution of the role and transformation challenges of Africa's independent security governance. *West Asia and Africa*, (1), 71.
- [8] Delany, M. R. (1861). *Official report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party*. Rhistoric Publications.
- [9] Zhou, H. K. (2025). From non-interference to non-indifference: The practical logic of the transformation of African regional security norms. *World Economics and Politics*, (9), 140.
- [10] Nie, W. J. (2013). Great power factors and the institutionalization of regional security mechanisms: A case study of the security mechanisms of ASEAN and the African Union. *Foreign Affairs Review (Journal of China Foreign Affairs University)*, (4), 88.
- [11] Oloka-Onyango, J. (2000). Human rights and sustainable development in contemporary Africa: A new dawn, or retreating horizons. *Buffalo Human Rights Law Review*, 6, 39–76.
- [12] Langton, D. J. (2006). *Africa: U.S. foreign assistance issues* (CRS Report for Congress). U.S. Department of State Foreign Press Center. <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/62657.pdf>
- [13] Deutsch, K. W., Burrell, S. A., Kann, R. A., Lee, M., Jr., Lichterman, M., Lindgren, R. E., Loewenheim, F. L., & Van Wagenen, R. W. (1957). *Political community and the North Atlantic Areas* (pp. 43–161). Greenwood Press.
- [14] VanWagenen, R. W. (1952). *Research in the international organization field: Some notes on a possible focus*. Center for Research on World Political Institution.
- [15] Adler, E., & Barnett, M. (2015). *Security community* (H. Sun, Trans.). World Knowledge Press.
- [16] Zheng, X. W. (2004). The "security community" theory and ASEAN's practice. *World Economics and Politics*, (5), 23.
- [17] United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. (2013). *Report on the effectiveness of anti-terrorism governance in Africa (2007–2012)*. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.