African Union and The Resolution of Malian Conflict, 2012-2022

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the efforts of African Union towards conflict resolution in Mali between 2012 and 2022. The Malian conflict is a very complex issue with multiple contributing factors such as historical tension and fall-out of crisis of governance between the government and the northern Mali (Taureg Separatist group) demanding for a stake in the government, because the region felt marginalized. The study is grounded in the collective security theory, which emphasizes the collective efforts of the African Union in joining hands together to fight an aggressor (terrorists) within African continent. The study adopted qualitative descriptive analysis of the data collected from secondary sources. Findings revealed that lack of adequate resources like funds, manpower and equipment was a major impediment in the resolution of the conflict. Towards addressing the problems, the study recommended that African Union and the agencies of African Union mandated for resolution of Malian conflict and that of others needs to have their missions spelt out and jurisdiction sorted out, this will help each organizations to know and plan how to effectively and efficiently implement their policies so as to be effective and efficient in achieving their goals; finally African Union must find viable sources of funding for its operation. Without such resources, the policies are just plans on paper

Keywords: African Union, Conflict, Conflict Resolution, Collective Security, Mali

INTRODUCTION

It's a known fact that the modern global system has been characterized by the issue of regionalism as observed in Bamidele (2016). The management, negotiation, settlement of borders, territorial disputes, intra-state conflicts, all take place within the regional levels. Apparently, because the Global International Organizations have been considered to be over-burdened, and Regional Organization emerges in a bid to proffer solution to regional problems, as with the case of African Union (AU)

Africa as a whole is a continent characterized by conflicts and crisis. There is hardly any country that has not contended with conflict, and majority of these conflicts were intra-state. As noted by Idigo (2022), the insurgency in the northern part of the country threatened security in the sub-Sahara region including Nigeria. Also, Ogbu (2017), affirmed that conflicts in African continent have resulted in decades of devastation and gratuitous destruction, impoverishment of the African population, political instability, institutional decay and socio-economic stagnation. Because these conflicts are intra-state, the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states enshrined in the Charter of the Organization of African Unity limited the roles of the organization and made it incapable and less effective in managing regional conflicts. This limitation and failure of the Organization of African Unity resulted in the formation of African Union (AU) in 2000

With the regional power conferred on the African Union, they has taken initiatives with huge success across African continent towards resolution of regional conflict as witnessed in Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, Mali etc. Mali is a landlocked African country situated in the Sahel region that experienced French colonial rule in the 19th century, which left a lasting impact on its political and economic structures, as well as its relationship with France and other western powers that are part and parcel of the country's contemporary challenges.

The conflict in Mali has been in existence for decades and rooted in pre-colonial and post-colonial French rule characterized by consistent marginalization of the Northern-Malian as observed in (Chauzal & Damme, 2015).

As noted by Idigo and Nwankwo (2025), the Malian conflict is a complex issue with multiple actors, including Islamic extremist groups. Making it difficult for African Union to efficiently respond to the conflict. More so, Okonkwo and Idigo (2024) noted that the rising insecurity is intricately linked to systemic governance failure. And the continuous marginalization of the northern Mali and non-inclusiveness in the government resulted in the first Tuareg rebellion in the year 1963, the second wave of the uprising emerged in 1990 and lasted until 1996 with Tuareg and Arab exiles forming as an alliance, as the government failed also to create conducive environment, provide infrastructural facilities, fight corruption and ensure good governance for its citizen, (Idigo, 2024). The third rebellion started in 2006, leading to signing of a peace agreement called 'Algiers Peace Agreement. Nevertheless, this agreement does not help in resolving the conflict as both parties kept on falling apart from the agreement signed. The fourth rebellion of the conflict in the early 2012 resulted in military coup against President Amadou Toumani Toure. Various international bodies have in various forms intervened in the conflict; the United Nations, France, EOWAS and African Union, after the adoption of the new charter of AU which held out promises on Africa's ability to deal with conflict within the continent. Despite the efforts, the conflict persisted.

Conceptual Clarification

African Union

Literature have traced the origin of African Union (AU) to the establishment of Organization of African Unity (OAU) on May 25, 1963, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia when the 32 African states that had gained independence at the time reached a consensus to form the Organization of African Unity with vision to facilitate the process of integration in African continent, empowerment of African states in the global economy and address the dynamics of socio-economic and political problems facing African countries (United States Agency for International Development, 2022).

African Union (AU) as a continental organization consisting of the 55 member states that make up the countries of African continent was successfully launched in 2002 as a successor to the Organization of African Unity (The African Union Commission, 2023). As observed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR (2022), the African Union is a member states that work together to address major political, social and economic issues, including preventing and ending conflict and promoting pan-African development and integration through its ambitious Agenda 2063.

Conflict

Scholars have made varied reasonable definitional attempts of the term, conflict. Common element that runs through their definitions is the fact that every conflict is a product of disagreement over specific interests or goals. To Quincy (cited in Ajayi & Buhari, 2014), conflict connotes "a condition in which identifiable group of human beings whether tribal, ethnic, linguistic, religious, socio-political, economic, cultural or otherwise is in conscious opposition to one or more other identifiable human group because these groups are pursuing what to be incompatible goals''. They maintained that conflicts arise from the interaction of individuals who have partly, incompatible goals, in which the ability of one actor to achieve his goals, depends to an important degrees on the decisions or choice that the other parties will take.

Boulding (cited in Bercovitch, Kremenyuk & Zartman, 2018) described conflict as a psychological state of affairs; which denotes a particular situation in which the parties to conflict are aware of their incompatibility and potential future positions. It depicts a situation in which the parties involved perceive goal incompatibility but do not necessarily engage in behavior which is mutually incompatible.

Albert (2001) argued that there is nothing wrong with conflict as it serves as a critical mechanism by which the goals and aspirations of individuals groups are articulated. He considered conflict as "a definition of creative solutions to human problems and a means to the development of a collective identity" (Albert, 2001).

Similarly, Adams and Iwu (2015) admit the fact that conflict can have negative consequences on the socio-political environment but can also be a valuable element of co-operation and progress. Robert (Ajayi & Buhari,

2014) asserted that conflict can exacerbate issues or disputes in the society and that the consequence of conflicts between individuals, groups, communities, states, or nations rarely cease with termination of overt hostilities.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution depicts a variety of approaches geared towards terminating conflicts through constructive solving of the problems, distinct from transformation or management of conflict (Udezo, 2017). Thus, Mailland Wood House (2001) asserted that any conflict resolution attempt should aim at addressing or resolving the deep rooted sources or causes of conflict and ensure that the behaviors of parties to conflict are no longer violent/hostile as well as changing the structure of the conflict.

To Best (2005), conflict resolution depicts a sense of finality, where the parties to a conflict are mutually satisfied with the outcome of a settlement and the conflict is resolved in a true sense of it. From the view of the scholar, one can assume that conflict is resolved when the basic needs of parties to conflict have been met with necessary satisfiers and their fears have been allayed

Wani (2011) described conflict resolution as a mechanism where parties to conflict come together and sort out their conflicts or incompatibilities by peaceful means. According to him, effective conflict resolution includes only peaceful means, methods and techniques for the maintenance of peace and security and to protect the coming generations from the plague of war.

To Tristancho (2023), conflict resolution depicts the process that organizations and teams follow to resolve disputes or conflicts of interest that might arise between team members.

To Imm (2022), conflict revolution connotes the process of ending a dispute and reaching agreement that satisfy all parties involved. The scholar further maintained that conflict is an essential part of human beings; thus, effective conflict resolution is not designed to avoid disagreements rather, resolution mechanisms are used to facilitate discussions, increase understanding and control emotional response.

Cooper and Grimsley (2021), observed that conflict resolution is the process (either formal or informal) where two or more parties synergies to resolve the conflict in a way where all parties are in agreement with the solution proposed.

In the view of Saaida (2023), conflict resolution strategies or mechanisms depict a range of approaches that can be employed to resolve conflicts in a constructive and peaceful manner. These strategies or mechanisms as portrayed by the scholar include but not limited to diplomacy, dialogue, negotiation and reconciliation processes. Each strategy offers different methods and techniques that tailored to the specific dynamics and complexities of the conflict being addressed.

Empirical Framework

The journal article by Oddih and Emesibe (2021), titled Malian conflict: underlying causes and implications 2012-2017, examined the underlying factors behind the 2012 Malian conflict and the implications of the conflict in the Sahel region. The study adopted quantitative research design with structure interview complemented with literature. The study found out that the 2012 Malian conflict was driven by various religious issue, violent extremist groups and volatility of the Sahel region.

Idigo and Osegbue (2025), carried out a study on 'African Union, conflict resolution and Malian conflict, 2012-2022' examined the African Union challenges towards the resolution of Malian conflict and the study found out that fiancé, political will, complexity of the African conflict are the impediment factors to the effort of the AU in resolving the Malian conflict.

Mensah (2023) on the other hand carried out a research on the topic, "A review of Mali's counter terrorism approach in the light of African Union interventions". The study evaluated the intervention of the African

Union (AU), through counter terrorism; in the management of Malian conflict. The study is qualitative and exploratory and made use of secondary method of data collection.

Further study by Idigo and Nwankwo (2025) titled ''African Union's conflict intervention framework and the Malian conflict, 2012-2022'' interrogated the AU's institutional framework and engagement in the Malian conflict. The study adopted qualitative descriptive research design and the study recommends that the institutional mechanism and procedures of AU should be well funded and fully operationalized in other to function effectively and efficiently in conflict situation.

Oluwadare, (2014) conducted a study on "The African Union and the conflict in Mali: extra-regional influence and the limitations of a regional actor". The paper examined the role of AU in conflict resolution in Mail as well as extra-regional influence and the limitations. The study which is qualitative and descriptive; made use of data gathered from various secondary sources. Findings from the study revealed that AU has played prominent roles in Somalia, Burundi, Liberia, Darfur and Chad.

A study conducted by Buyoya (2018) on "the recurrent security crisis in Mali and the role of the African Union" aimed at interrogating the recurring security crisis in Northern Mali with a focus on the diplomatic and military role of the African Union in managing the conflict. It is qualitative; descriptive and made use of data gathered from various secondary sources. Findings from the study revealed that crises in Mali have their roots in the question of political governance such as issue of management of the ethnic diversity of the Malian society. The study recommended the need to fight against corruption as well as urgent need for development strategy by both regional and international bodies.

The journal article by Egnim (2018) on the topic titled "African Union's role in the resolution of the conflict in Mali", examined the role played by the African Union in resolving Malian conflict. It is a qualitative study and data were gathered through various secondary sources and built on realist theory of conflict. The study argued that Malian crisis is a product of issues such as political and economic marginalization, poor governance leading to ethnic dissatisfaction and rebellions of some form of religious radicalism and criminal networks that transpired into Malian conflict. Findings from the study revealed that even though, African Union, just like other international bodies have intervened in Malian conflict, the purpose of interventions have not been realized as the conflict persists. Among others, the study recommended urgently, the need for African Union to improve the integration of African defense forces and reduce the overall costs that individual African countries have to bear on many African peacekeeping operations.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study builds on Collective Security theory as the theoretical framework of analysis. Collective Security as a theory for peace is rooted in Cardinal Richelieu's proposed scheme for collective security in 1648 and subsequently reflected in Westphalia Peace of 1648 (Skirbekk & Gilje, 2001). An institutionalized system of collective security was first realized by the formation of the League of Nation in 1919 due to the First World War. The creation of the League of Nation built on the longstanding efforts since the 19th century to reduce the effects of war on belligerents and civilians alike by adopting new rules of humanitarian law and outlawing war and interstate aggression under international law (Nwagwabi, 2019).

The exponents of Collective Security theory include Baha'ullah, Martin Wright, Immanuel Kant, Woodrow Wilson, Michael Joseph and was deemed fit to apply interests in security in a broad manner to avoid grouping powers into opposing camps and refusing to draw division that would leave anyone out. The theory has also been cited by international, regional and sub-regional bodies such as the League of Nations, United Nations, Organization of African Unity (now African Union) as a principle in dissuading any member state or group from acting in a manner likely to threaten peace/security and thus avoid a conflict (Yost, 1977).

Collective security depicts a system based on universal obligations of all nations to join forces against an aggressor state as soon as the fact of aggression is determined by established procedures. In such a system, an aggression is defined as a wrong in universal terms and as an aggressor, as soon as it is identified, stands condemned.

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Application of the Theory

The fitness of Collective Security theory rests on the fact that the theory of Collective Security advocates for political, regional and global security arrangement in which each state accepts that security of one is the concern and responsibility of all and for this reason commits to a collective response to threats to or breaches to international peace and security. For this reason, the theory has a very strong capability on the discourse of Malian conflict and the collective role of the African Union (AU) in eradicating conflict in Mali, a sub-part of African continent.

METHODOLOGY

The study has qualitative-descriptive research design orientation and this type of design helps to study and examine given situation and present them the way they are. Thus, it helps to reveal the attributes and elements of the phenomena involved. More so, data were gathered from various secondary sources which included documented evidence such as published materials which include media publications/newspapers, journal articles, reports and textbooks from well-equipped libraries

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Impact of the African Union Intervention in the Malian conflict

Despite the challenges of AU in conflict resolution in the Malian conflict, the fact still remains that the impact of AU intervention in Malian conflict cannot be over-emphasized. AU succeeded in the following intervention;

Political and Diplomatic Intervention

After the transfer of authority from AFISMA to MINUSMA, AU also created the African Union Mission for Mali and Sahel (MISAHEL) in order to maintain a presence of the AU and to support Mali and the Sahel countries in their stabilization and development efforts. MISAHEL was tasked with managing the African Union (AU) Strategy for the Sahel region and aims to support Mali in the crisis recovery process and help the countries of the Sahel face security, governance and development challenges.

In addressing these challenges, the AU can build on its progress and continue to play a vital role in promoting peace, stability and development in Mali. The Strategy is in pursuance of a number of relevant instruments, particularly the Constitutive Act of the AU and the Agenda 2063.

Military Interventions

The starting point of the interrogation of the impact of AU intervention is the AFISMA plan which came about as a policy drawn from ideas from the AU, ECOWAS and the EU.

From 2012 when the AU got involved in the Malian conflict till the present moment, its impact in the conflict has not been profound as was expected from the plan. Though the intervention and involvement of the AU in the conflict helped to achieve some degree of success in some areas of the conflict but it fell far short of ensuring that the conflict is resolved or any lasting peace.

Challenges of African Union towards Resolution of Malian Conflict

In the Malian crisis, ECOWAS and the AU were in competition to take the lead in the intervention. The problem came from the fact that the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are independent entities, governed by their own charters and not formally subordinate to the AU (Nathan, 2016). The 2008 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cooperation between the African Union and Regional Economic Commissions in the area of Peace and Security, which should have clarified the relationship between the RECs and the AU, suffers from two limitations, and this lack of clear responsibilities affected the AU and limited its

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ability in resolving the Malian conflict. For instance, the head of the mission represented the AU and the deputy represented ECOWAS, which led to lack of clarity about AFISMA's chain of command (Dersso, 2014).

Another part of the APSA that affected and limited the resolution of the Malian conflict by the AU is the issue of the non-existence of an African Standby Force. While the ASF is supposed to be able to function in a variety of ways from observation to humanitarian assistance, it was intended to facilitate the rapid deployment of troops to conflict areas on the continent, avoiding the delays often experienced when waiting for countries to volunteer troops and deploy them.

Lack of coordination and cooperation efforts among various International and regional actors, especially the UN delayed in deployment of AFISMA for long before the rebels campaign triggered the French intervention.

Another challenge is poor funding, as African Union could not raise the required funds for the operation and most member states that sent their soldiers to the mission were unable to meet the financial cost of sustaining their groups on ground. More so, continuous reliance on external partners for funding also undermine the African Union's decision-making capacity to conflict.

The Status of the conflict, 2022

As at 2022, the Malian conflict has continued, and there appears to be no end in sight. The state institutions have not been able to function properly. Impunity and disregard for the rule of law reigns as attacks by extremist groups such as al-Qaeda and Islamic state affiliates, continue to occur in the northern and central Mali. Clashes between the Malian armed forces and the Coordination of Azawad Movement put the 2015 peace deal between the two parties at risk. Mali experienced two military coups in 2020 and 2021, leading to political uncertainty. More so, the conflict in Mali has led to a significant humanitarian crisis, with over 400,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 1.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance (World report, 2024; Mali Event, 2023).

There are number of prospects for success which includes, African Union haven showed and demonstrated a strong commitment to resolving the Malian conflict with continuous engagement and support; through regional support by fostering regional cooperation, bringing together neighboring countries and regional organizations to address the conflict; inclusive dialogue and African Union encouraging participation from various stakeholders, including political parties, civil society, and religious leaders; peace building efforts from AU by focusing on reconciliation and development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Malian crisis which had engulfed the nation for decades led to dismemberment of the country, humanitarian crisis, coups. Despite numerous peace deals of Algiers agreement, Bamako agreement, Tamanrasset agreement, National pact, Ouagadougou agreement, Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, as well as deployment of troops by African Union and others, there appears to be no end in sight for the nation as the conflict has continued. Today, Mali has numerous ungovernable territories and is referred to as the African Wild-West where all sorts of non-state actors have made their haven and thrive in.

The African Union has many agencies and policies for the resolution and prevention of conflict in Africa which were deployed in Mali. Through the efforts of these agencies and their activities, which ranges from political, diplomatic, military ranged to humanitarian aid notable result including to ensuring the continual territorial integrity of the nation were recorded. Efforts at maintaining democracy and civilian rule has not been too successful in Mali and many of the peace deal agreements appeared to have been relegated to the background. This leads to the conclusion that the efforts of the organization so far has not resolved the conflict completely due to many factors that are both intrinsic in the organization's structure and processes and other external ones.

Recommendations

The study therefore recommended that;
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1. The agencies of the AU mandated for resolution of the Malian conflict and that of others in Africa need to have their mission and authority spelt out and jurisdiction sorted out. This will help each organization to know and plan how to effectively implement their policies so as to be effective and efficient in achieving their goal. The Malian conflict highlighted the urgent need for the operational take off of African Stand-by Force (ASF) established since 2002. The non-functional existence was responsible for the clumsy response of the AU at the beginning of the conflict. Even it's (AU's) coordination with ECOWAS, a sub-regional body, as well as other non-African actors were not encouraging. There is, therefore the need for more effective division of labour and coordination between AU and sub-regional bodies like ECOWAS as well as other global partners. Shared Understanding of the principles of APSA by all the actors are vital for improved peace and security operations. An improved communication between AU and regional blocs can decrease the AU reliance on non- African actors in dealing with African problems as witnessed in Mali with little success. With specific focus on Mali, the Panel of the Wise consultations with all the segments of the Malian nation to come to a desired government that will be anchored on strong institutions that reflect the will of the people rather than foreign interest can achieve the desired peace and stable country the nation needs for its citizens. Also the effective utilization of the Standby Force in conjunction with an organic legitimate security force of the nation can help to stop the activities of the terrorists and criminal gangs.

2. AU's operations framework is largely underfunded as a result of the Peace Fund being under-sourced. Accordingly African must find viable sources of funding for its operations. In this regards, it is recommended African states and their leaders be encouraged to timely and appropriately pay up assessed contributions. The needed incentive is that the destabilization of Mali will in future affect other nearby and farther states, it will be to the good of the other AU members to ensure that they provide the necessary resources to stop the conflict and have the nation become stable.

Allied to the above, there is urgent need for action on the AU decision in 2016 to initiate and implement 0.2% Import levy on all eligible imported goods into the continent as viable source of fund for its operation. These sources would enable the AU fund at least 50% of its operations before looking for outside help. Relying on outside donors and organizations to provide the resources for the resolution of the conflict means that the foreign organizations and nation's interest will be the first consideration in the resolution of the conflict and not the welfare and good of Mali or the continent. The AU has to take the lead and have the other foreign interests and intervention or input be secondary.

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