Chronicles of African Engagement: Beyond a Dualist Reading of Foreign Intervention

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, the conflict management and peacebuilding (CM/PB) domain has undergone significant transformations. This has resulted in a shift from traditional Western-centric approach to a more crowded CM/PB market that is particularly evident in the African continent. However, academic discourse has evolved from evaluating the effectiveness of the liberal peace model, to scrutinising the characteristics of an alleged alternative CM/PB paradigm proposed by these rising powers. Drawing on a (neo)realist perspective, the study proposes two lines of argumentation to advance a new research agenda. Firstly, it explores the supply side of CM/PB policies by emphasising the motivations and policy choices driven primarily by strategic interests and the regime survival of intervening states. Secondly, it analyses the demand side of CM/PB by highlighting the active role of intervened states in shaping intervention strategies based on their interests and preferences. Through illustrative examples from Africa, this paper demonstrates how national interests and host states' agency intersect to shape CM/PB strategies. The article challenges simplistic categorisations of Western/liberal versus Eastern/illiberal CM/PB, and advocates for a nuanced understanding that considers the complexities of global power dynamics and national interests.

Keywords: Non-Western Conflict Management, Peacebuilding, Africa, Illiberal Peace, Subaltern.

Introduction

Despite historically being expanded by Western actors, the peace and security provision market has widely changed in the last two decades. In this article, we adopt a broad understanding of peace practice(s) while differentiating between a minimalist and maximalist conception (Badache, Hellmüller & Salaymehet, 2022). To this effect, it can be said therefore that if conflict management/CM aims to contain violence and reach an agreement between the warring parties, then peacebuilding/PB focuses on identifying the root causes of conflict and seeks to create 'positive peace'. The emergence of rising powers like China and Russia, has diversified the conflict management and peacebuilding domain. This shift signifies a departure from the Western-centric approach towards a more complex and crowded environment. The African continent particularly, is witnessing its third surge of foreign interest after the 19th-century scramble and the Cold War period, with new state and non-state actors rushing to build and improve diplomatic, strategic and commercial ties with African states. Consequently, academic discourse has transitioned from evaluating the efficacy of the liberal peace model to examining the characteristics of an alleged alternative paradigm proposed by rising powers. Departing from simplistic categorisations of Western-liberal versus Eastern-illiberal CM/PB (Ikenberry, 2024; Lewis, Heathershaw & Megoran, 2018), we contend for a refined understanding that acknowledges the complexities of global power dynamics and national interests. Building on extant literature problematising this dualist view (Levorato & Donelli, 2024; Mateja & Rice, 2022), we attempt to address the lack of an alternative interpretative framework by drawing on a (neo)realist perspective.

We propose two lines of argumentation to advance a new research agenda in CM/PB studies. Firstly, we explore the supply side of CM/PB policies by focusing on intervening states' motivations and policy choices. We contend that states, regardless of their regime type and geopolitical affiliation, prioritise strategic interests and regime survival in crisis scenarios. This (neo)realist perspective challenges the notion of distinct Western and non-Western CM/PB models and emphasises the primacy of national security interests in shaping foreign interventions. Secondly, we analyse the demand side of CM/PB by emphasising the active role of intervened states in shaping intervention strategies. Contrary to mainstream literature, which often portray host states as passive recipients of external interventions, we argue that host states exercise agency in selecting the approaches that better align with their interests and preferences. Through illustrative examples from the African continent, we prove the plausibility of our argument by demonstrating how national interests and host states'

agency intersect to shape CM/PB strategies. On one hand, we account for how the growing relevance of 'new' actors in Africa must be tempered considering their respective spheres of influence and states' relative power and capabilities. Here, Western liberalism and non-Western liberalism appear exaggerated in relation to the adoption of a stabilisation approach by the former, and the selective engagement with the multilateral system and liberal discourses by the latter. On the other hand, we also account for the growing trend towards pragmatism in CM/PB, particularly in Africa, which underscores the importance of considering intervened states' agency in shaping intervention dynamics. Through extraversion (Bayart, 2000), African countries navigate the multipolar (dis)order leveraging their greater strategic value to maximise their bargaining power.

The study constitutes the first exploration into a new research agenda and contributes to the CM/PB literature by offering a theoretical framework that is grounded in a nuanced understanding of power dynamics and agency. For this purpose, the study is structured thus; In the introductory section, we present our argument in an innovative and advanced manner. In the second section, we delve deeper into the proposed interpretative framework by providing a CM/PB view as an assemblage of foreign policy tools from which states selectively choose and offer a more nuanced interpretation of the concept of agency. The empirical part concerning the supply and demand-side of CM/PB in Africa is discussed in sections three and four. Here, we provide a descriptive overview of the (foreign) state actors' engagement in the continent, and the active role of African states in shaping CM/PB approaches. At the end of the article, we then discuss our conclusion.

Understanding Contemporary Conflict Management and Peacebuilding Dynamics

Armed acts of violence such as civil wars, military coups and regional conflicts persist throughout the world, especially within the African continent, which still hosts most internal conflicts worldwide (Bakaki & Mehrl, 2021). The task of managing and resolving these conflicts has become widespread and is no longer monopolised by Western European and North American actors, but includes several state and non-state new players. In Africa, focus has moved from Western-led conflict management with the United Nations (UN)- supported by OECD-DAC's members as the principal actors in charge of maintaining continental peace and security, to a more crowded and complex situation involving several actors. This was evident in the early 2000s with the creation of the African Union (AU). Later in the 2010s, the 'rising powers', which were so defined as a result of their fast economic development

and expanding political and cultural influence (Pinar, 2012), took a more assertive foreign policy stance towards Africa. Examples of this includes; the *Going Global Strategy* which led to the first tri-annual Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2003 by former Chinese President Jiang Zemin and the new course of Turkish foreign policy with the establishment of the *Year of Africa* in 2005.[3] The trend towards an open CM/PB market has also been visible outside the continent, examples include: China, India and Indonesia playing a leading role in Southeast Asia- Myanmar being an example (Alexandra & Lanteigne, 2017; Burton, 2019), Brazil and Haiti being an example in Latin America (Abdenur & Call, 2017), Russia in the Caucasus, and Syria (Lewis, 2022). In light of this, the decades-long debate on the effectiveness of the liberal peace model used by Western states to deal with crisis scenarios (Chandler, 2010; Richmond & MacGinty, 2015) was replaced by academic efforts to outline the characteristics of an (alleged) alternative model, and to study the role of rising powers in contesting a liberal international order depicted as being in deep crisis (Kobayashi & Yuan, 2022; Jütersonke at al., 2021).[4] Based on this, a distinction between 'Western liberal peacebuilding' and 'Eastern illiberal peacebuilding' has been raised to considerable prominence (Lewis, Heathershaw & Megoran, 2018; Uesugi & Richmond, 2021).

However, this categorisation has proved to be inherently problematic. Relying on rigid binaries such as Western/non-Western and liberal/illiberal, peacebuilding has lent itself to widespread criticism of orientalising and colonial discourses (Mateja & Rice, 2022). Besides, the idea to prompt a vision that sees two opposing models of CM/PB stemming from alternative and mutually exclusive world-ordering views is not only reductive and conceptually over-stretched, but also risks legitimising the problematic idea of a clash of civilisations going on between a global (liberal) West and a global (illiberal) East in competing for the help and partnership of the global South (Ikenberry, 2024). Apart from these claims, here is a growing body of literature that is converging on the shared understanding that this categorisation does not reflect reality. In fact, extant research on the topic is quite general in its findings on the characteristics of the CM/PB model that rising powers might be proposing. It has also been found that the two concepts – peace-enforcement and peacebuilding are often confused together (Lewis, Heathershaw & Megoran, 2018), and scholars are avoiding differentiating between domestic and international interventions (Cheung, 2019).

Comparative studies seem to have focused more on the ideational (discursive) component of this (alleged) model by often exaggerating its 'defining features' and at times, forcibly matching stated

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[3] An investment agenda to open up to sub-Saharan African countries.
[4] On this regard see also Ikenberry (2010), and Flockhart et al. (2014).

intentions with actual practice (Owen, 2021; Carothers & Samet-Marram, 2015; Cooley, 2015). Although some consensus has been reached on prioritising development over political reform, a policy of non-interference and a general preference for bilateral-elitist fora rather than multilateralism has become common elements of the rising powers' approaches (Hösli & Selleslaghs, 2020); and there seems to be no major difference between Western and the so-called non-Western/illiberal CM/PB. Indeed, Western actors are not averse to the use of unilateral solutions, having been accused for years of pursuing goals said to be liberal through means connoted as being illiberal (Paris, 2010), as well as indulging in forms of 'compromised peacebuilding', in which clamour for political reforms are only acknowledged in connotative ways and rarely implemented. These allow authoritarian regimes to develop unhindered, as recently highlighted by the continued European support to coup governments in Chad and Guinea (Heathershaw, 2009). Evidence shows that rising powers are not offering any "clear alternative model, ideology, or model of the state or peace" (Jütersonke et al., 2021:945). Today's rising powers appear only modestly dissatisfied with the current international order, which they usually contest from a global justice perspective, because of its illiberalism (Schweller, 2015; Duzgit, 2023) which they selectively engage in.

China and Russia are usually portrayed as the epitome of a revisionist state; however, they both have much to defend in the current global order, especially their permanent seat in the UN Security Council (Gerrits, 2020). In a nutshell, such a dichotomic view can, at best, serve as an analytical approach that is inadequate in providing a fine-grained understanding of current developments in the CM/PB domain. Many scholars have come to the same conclusion (Mateja & Rice, 2022; Hösli and Selleslaghs, 2020; Turner & Kuhn, 2019). What is missing however, is a novel interpretative framework. Mac Ginty (2019), and Hösli & Selleslaghs (2020) have provided us with a useful clue suggesting the adoption of a (neo)realist framework of analysis. In a multipolar order "realist frames of power seem to be more effective in helping us interpret international trends" (Mac Ginty, 2019: 254). The adoption of this lens should not be seen as a step backward in time, but as a realisation that action counts more than words when it comes to contestation (Stimmer & Wisken, 2019) and that it is national (security) interest that drives state action abroad and not vague altruistic motives.

So, we build on this by suggesting two lines of argumentation that, in our view, will help build a new research agenda in the study of CM/PB within a multipolar order. The first line is focused on the supply side of CM/PB policies, which are the intervening states. Here we argue that a good move forward is to start thinking about CM/PB for what they are, that is, an assemblage of foreign policy tools (military power, diplomacy or sanctions) from which states selectively choose the tools to use

based on material and value-based motivations. However, their choices are balanced by external and self-perceptions of their relative power (Levorato & Donelli, 2024; Mateja & Rice, 2022). Professed goals may not coincide with actual practice, because short-term thinking is bounded by contingencies, which, in a given scenario, may affect different actors in similar ways.

The second line of argumentation is on the CM/PB demand side, that is, the intervened states. Unlike what mainstream literature often suggests, we claim that they (intervened state) have an active role in deciding which type of approach will be more 'popular' in shaping intervening states' policy tools. Within the novel CM/PB market, host states are finding themselves in the position to choose among a variety of approaches that are beneficial to their interests and ambitions (Ghimire, 2018). The general trend toward pragmatism in CM/PB is especially evident in the African continent (Karlsrud, 2019) not only in "the strategic response to both intervention fatigue and the changed geopolitical context" (Belloni & Costantini, 2019:511), but also in line with local governments preferences towards quick-fixing solutions, aimed at the delivery of basic services, the maintenance of security and territorial control (Ibidem).

In sum, we argue that there are no opposing CM/PB models, but rather, a set of instruments from which state actors selectively choose. Despite apparently dissimilar ambitions, short and medium-term goals coincide on security concerns and economic priorities, emphasising institutional stability, economic growth, and cross-border security (Levorato & Donelli, 2024). Interveners' political choices must also take into account host states' preferences, which are increasingly oriented towards pragmatism, and whose growing agency is linked to the increased number of CM/PB providers in the market. On the one hand, we seek to demonstrate this by providing a descriptive overview of state actors' engagement within the African continent, interpreted through the (neo)realist lens of CM/PB as a foreign policy tool, and outlining differences and similarities among actors' CM/PB strategies towards the continent. On the other hand, we offer evidence on how intervened states actively shape CM/PB approaches seemingly in line with the so-called 'pragmatic turn' in CM/PB. Therefore, the analysis must be intended as a plausibility test[5] for the significance and coherence of our argument (further described in the section below), to provide a novel interpretative paradigm for studying the evolution of national CM/PB strategies.

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5 See Levy (2008).

Reconceptualising Conflict Management and Peacebuilding: A Theoretical Framework

Our (twofold) argument is reflective of a (neo)realist interpretation of CM/PB as consisting of an assemblage of policy instruments adopted and implemented as a result of a synthesis of both demand and supply-side incentives and constraints (Levorato & Donelli, 2024). Classic interpretations of CM/PB are found in the conflict and peace research literature where they are traditionally described as a world-ordering practice, embedded in the principles of political liberalism (Paris, 2010; Mac Ginty, 2010; Richmond, 2011). Although the existing investigations are valid and useful, we also acknowledge that it gives greater relevance to discourse over actual practice and overstates nation-states' capacity to drive change. Above this, its explanatory value has been undermined by recent developments in the CM/PB milieu, which sees the participation of a multitude of actors and a general convergence towards realpolitik in solving (inter/intra) national disputes (Moe &Markus-Michael, 2018).

Our first line of argumentation lies in the fact that conflict management and peacebuilding are inherently political business which cannot be separated from national interests' projection. According to this, peace interventions are not solely used for matters of global peace and security but their deployment is shaped by individual states' foreign policy considerations (Meiske & Ruggeri, 2022). As "goal-oriented [strategies] targeting entities outside the policymakers' political jurisdiction" (Hermann, 1990: 5), CM/PB fall within the notion of foreign policy tool. Existing literature however, has frequently omitted this. One might say, as a matter of fact that indulging in a dichotomic characterisation of CM/PB approaches, guided more by states' ideology and geopolitical affiliation than by an objective comparative analysis of the policy instruments employed by state actors, thus (arbitrarily) assumes that a divergent ideological and/or geopolitical affiliation implies the use of different or contrasting instruments. Such a vision is in line with a widespread narrative among liberal advocates and portrays "a free world competing with a neo-authoritarian world" (Wright, 2018). As already mentioned, this dichotomic view is not only inherently flawed as one driven by an identitarian understanding of CM/PB policies that often overlaps discourses and stated goals with actual practice, but it is also misleading as it neither recognises the role of national security interests as the main rationale for foreign intervention, nor sufficiently considers the constraints imposed by states' relative power and capabilities, and their effect on the type of approach used in engaging in crisis scenarios. In this regard, recent evidence showed that the net of the rhetoric surrounding state actors' activities, motivations and how they operate on the ground show little difference (Levorato & Donelli, 2024).

We put forward an interpretation of CM/PB as an assemblage of foreign policy tools serving national interests. Such an understanding provides a better understanding or grasp of current developments in the field, and likewise for the recognition that just as Western states' conflict management and peacebuilding activities are predominantly aimed at conflict-affected countries that are perceived as posing a greater security threat (Petrikova & Lasell, 2017), similarly, rising powers have used CM/PB as a tool to alleviate cross-border issues and promote stabilisation (Levorato & Donelli, 2024).[6]

Following this, it should be apparent how Western liberalism and rising power (non-Western) illiberalism are frequently exaggerated. According to Shi and Langjia (2019), there is little evidence that Western countries, like any other country in the world, have exceptional powers that eschew realist logic but instead, behave in accordance with principles. This so-called 'illiberal peace' is not an exclusive property of 'non-Western' powers. Duarte and Sousa (2024), for example, claimed that UN stabilisation missions in the CAR, the DRC and Mali have prompted political exclusion, violence, power inequality and authoritarianism. Similarly, rising powers can adopt liberal approaches such as democratisation in conflict-affected states to benefit them in those states where they are popular, as in the case of Kenya's former ruling Jubilee Party's sympathy for Beijing (Jütersonke et al., 2021). Moreover, such an interpretation of CM/PB brings attention back to the constraints derived from the status of middle powers and small states held by the overwhelming majority of nations, thus, disclosing an overestimation of the willingness and ability of rising powers to counter the liberal international order and propose an alternative cosmovision. China, for instance, has struggled to create a Beijing Consensus that is internationally and transnationally applicable and innovative. Similarly, Russia has never been seriously engaged in the promotion abroad of an alternative set of values that is often "perceived as a partner of last resort" (Siegle, 2021:86).

Our second line of argumentation is still related to power, more precisely to its linkage with the concept of agency as the "ability of states […] to generate and deploy a range of capabilities (hard and soft) in the pursuit of their national interest" (Andreasson, 2011: 144). The conventional reading of the concept is closely linked to the ability to get others to do what one wants (Lukes, 2005), which would be possible through encouragement or the use of force (De Wijk, 2020). By limiting the exercise of power to economic and military resources, classic literature on agency in IR (Brown, 2012) has largely left out Southern states which are seen more as objects of power than as

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6 Significant evidence of this is the involvement of Turkey and the Gulf monarchies in the MENA and Horn of Africa regions (Donelli, 2021; Miller and Verhoeven, 2019), or Brasilian engagement in Africa through the Community of Portuguese-Language Countries (Abdenur and Call, 2017).

subjects capable of exercising it. However, this distinction is reductive, as it does not take into account the ability of subaltern state actors to move between the interstices left by greater powers and turn the external environment into an important resource of political leverage[7]. For African countries, often seen as paradigmatic cases of powerless states, this entails exercising a different kind of agency to that of more powerful states that need to be imaginative. African countries' agency must be viewed both in the sense of the roles they are performing, that is, that of subaltern client actors, and the structural contextual constraints that inform that subjectivity (Ibidem). In this regard, Bakaki and Mehrl (2021:259) talk about trickery as a major formality of action which has constantly recurred in Africa's relations with the rest of the world.

Trickery in this regard is defined as that quality which allows a person to manipulate hostile forces which are too powerful to be confronted directly, but can be turned to good account in spite of their hostile nature, in such a way that will be useful for one's own purposes. Similarly, Bayart (2000) refers to African history as one of extraversion to demonstrate how the discourse on Africa's marginality is nonsense. In the author's words: "the leading actors in [African] societies have tended to compensate for their difficulties in the autonomisation of their power and in intensifying the exploitation of their dependants by deliberate recourse to the strategies of extraversion, mobilising resources derived from their (possibly unequal) relationship with the external environment" (Ibidem:218-19). Agency is not just a structurally embedded process but also a temporally embedded process (Brown, 2012). That is why African states' agency must be read through the evolution of the current world order. Building on this, one could say that "the novel multipolar system has returned to Africa the rents it used to acquire from diplomatic positioning during the Cold War" (Bakaki & Mehrl, 2021:239). In the field of CM/PB, African leaders have more choices now than ever before, and this puts them in the position of engaging in tough bargaining with intervening states and the great powers. As the fight to remain relevant is central in the competition to maintain or enhance influence, traditional and rising powers have made themselves willing to compromise on their principles to align with national objectives. Various authors have confirmed this point by providing evidence on how Western countries have lessened their demands on host states and lowered their declared transformative aspirations (Belloni & Costantini, 2019); or how increasingly assertive "host states have resisted liberal interventions, and have pressed for mandates that more closely align with the self-interest of authoritarian governments" (Karlsrud, 2019:2).

In the next section, we present evidence that supports this (twofold) argument. The reader should bear in mind that this is mostly anecdotal, and it is not our intention to offer a conclusive and exhaustive

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[7] With some exceptions found in the literature on small states (Miller and Verhoeven, 2020).

reconstruction of a case study for which we do not have enough space. The evidence that follows is presented by critically drawing on relevant secondary sources and referring specifically to the events of the last decade (since 2010), which is an era characterised by a new wave of foreign interest in Africa dubbed "the new scramble" (Mateos, 2023).

Supply-side/intervening states

The extent of foreign engagement in the continent is without parallel. The years2010 to 2016 saw more than 320 embassies opened in Africa. This is arguably the biggest embassy-building boom anywhere ever. Turkey alone opened 26 embassies. Military ties are deepening asChina is now the biggest arms seller to sub-Saharan Africa[8]. Russia has signed 19 military deals with African states since 2014, while Gulf states are building bases in the Horn of Africa (Berhe & Hongwu, 2013). However, behind the growing relevance of these 'new' actors, it must be considered that some of them (such as Russia, China, India and Brazil) are moving outside their normal sphere of influence or regional complex (Buzan and Weaver, 2003) and exposing themselves to constraints dictated by resource availability and foreign policy priorities. China, for example, has shown particular inflexibility in adhering to its policy of non-interference in Africa,[9] privileging a lend and build strategy, compared to its action in Myanmar and Nepal (Burton, 2019). Even in recent years, China has complemented its traditional (soft power) approach on the continent with security measures due to reputational issues, business interests, and the safety of one million plus Chinese citizens living in the continent.[10] Most of this gradualist engagement took place through multilateral channels (Donelli, 2023). Examples of this dynamic are its contribution to UN peacekeeping missions in Africa (e.g., Mali or South Sudan), and its alliances with African actors to promote regional multilateral institutions (Ngugi, 2021; Mateos, 2023). The same applies to Brazil, whose commitment to peace and security in Africa is still modest and has so far mainly focused on Guinea-Bissau with the most active engagement at the UN level where it assumed over time, a leadership role within the Peacebuilding Commission[11] (Abdenur &Charles, 2018).

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[8] See on this the 2024 SIPRI report on *Trends in International Arms Transfers*, available at:
https://www.sipri.org/publications/2024/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-international-arms-transfers-2023.
[9] On the occasion of his visit to Africa in 1963, Shou Enlai outlined the eight principles for cooperation between Africa and China based on non-interference and peaceful coexistence.
[10] Some prominent examples are the organisation of China-Africa Defence and Security Forums starting in 2018, the participation of Chinese officers in the training of police forces of several African countries, the organisation of military exercises in Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana or Nigeria, the construction of a military base in Djibouti in 2016 and in Equatorial Guinea in 2021 (Oscar Mateos, 2023).
[11] At the 2024 formal meeting, Brazil was elected as new Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission.

India's commercial interests in the Indian Ocean led to a type of commitment largely driven by the private sector through strong government support (Tonneland, 2014). Russia has adopted a strategy that minimises costs by employing a combination of mercenary and disinformation interventions in support of isolated leaders. Libya serves as an example of how Russia pursues its strategic goals in Africa by expanding geopolitical influence through low-cost ventures that offer economic gains to Moscow and President Vladimir Putin's close associates (Siegle, 2021). Even for those rising powers that have Africa as a geostrategic priority, capability constraints have played a role in shaping their strategy. Turkey, which is closer to Africa than most other middle and major powers, despite having recently veered towards a hard security dimension following the opening of a military base in Mogadishu, and being involved in the regional conflicts in Sudan and Ethiopia, still relies primarily on a combination of economic and cultural diplomacy initiatives, with a strong focus on education. This involves civil society and business actors, as the main drivers of its distinctive approach to Africa, which is referred to by Donelli (2018) as the "Ankara Consensus." Similarly, the limitations of Gulf Monarchies' status as small powers have influenced their engagement on the continent: Qatar has relied mainly on niche foreign policy and soft power (Pericoli & Donelli, 2024) to exert influence and achieve its goals while the United Arab Emirates have exploited their influence as a maritime-merchant power in the Gulf of Aden (Miller-Verhoeven, 2020).

Western traditional actors therefore maintain a predominant presence in Africa. Despite the common misperception that the United States has not been playing its historical leadership role in recent years, U.S. engagement on the continent is still of great magnitude with the widest military presence under AFRICOM, comprising of a network of 29 military posts stretching from one side of Africa to another, and a USAID office in almost every country of the region. Yet, the surge of stabilisation as a strategic priority for Western countries (EU, 2016) has led to the adoption of a 'pragmatic approach' that is far from what we would traditionally call 'liberal' (Goodhand & Sedra, 2013). Stabilisation has been defined as a way to "enable legitimate institutions to rapidly deliver basic services and security to local populations thereby reducing the risk of relapse into violence and allowing displaced persons to return" (EU, 2016:30). To this end, border management and capacity building among the security forces became the two main areas of intervention for European Union's CSDP operations (Raineri & Strazzari, 2019), as witnessed by the mandates of the twelve EU missions currently deployed in Libya, Horn of Africa, CAR, Sahel and Mozambique (Levorato & Sguazzini, 2023). Thus, in the last few years, the EU dropped its normative commitment to conflict-sensitive and security-comprehensive approaches to adopt an approach that has little to do with democratic governance and fundamental rights and a lot to do with greasing the clientelist machinery of military elites (Raineri

& Strazzari, 2019:554). While most European countries pursue their security agenda within the EU hat, a notable exception is France, which tried to portray herself as *gendarme d'Afrique* (Vallin, 2015), having conducted military operations in countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, and the CAR, with counterterrorism at the centre of its efforts, as demonstrated by *Operation Serval*, followed by operation *Barkhane*, in Mali (2013-2022). Although Paris usually presents herself as a guardian of democracy, her support for authoritarian regimes (e.g., CAR) has caused disappointment due to the double standards shown when the country adopted a conciliatory stance towards Chad's military coup in April 2021, while condemning those in Mali, Guinea, and Gabon.

Without depicting rising powers as liberal entrepreneurs, it should be noted that, contrary to the popular image of normative contenders and one-sided actors, much of their actions in the field of African peace and security takes place within multilateral fora, and the resort to liberal discourse is far from uncommon. China's novel assertive stance toward security issues in Africa has been substantiated through a more active engagement in UN peace operations and the offering of training to African peacekeepers (Oscar Mateos, 2023; Tonneland, 2014). On the side of discourses, "while rejecting the universality of liberal tenets, Chinese socialist values include themselves the main components of current international norms such as freedom, equality and democracy although with some discrepancies derived from rival interpretations" (Shi & Langjia, 2019:77). India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, are the largest contributor of peacekeepers to UN missions in Africa, and the second largest donor after the United States to the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF), which aims to strengthen the voice of civil society, promote human rights and encourage the participation of all groups in democratic processes around the world.[12] Together with South Africa and Brazil, it founded the IBSA (India-Brazil-South Africa) Forum as a platform for South-South cooperation and as a means to highlight its democratic credentials (Tonneland, 2014). The predilection for multilateralism is essential to understanding Brazilian efforts towards peace and security in the continent. Although the Latin American state eschews direct engagement in the promotion of democracy and human rights in other countries, it is committed to it whenever a specific demand arises via a multilateral forum, such as the Community of Portuguese-Language Countries (CPLP; Abdenur & Call, 2018). Turkish multitrack approach (Donelli, 2021) involved several multilateral initiatives, especially for Somalia, having participated in and hosted peace processes and donor conferences, including the Istanbul I and II conferences with the UN in 2010 and 2012 (Levorato & Donelli, 2024).

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[12] https://www.un.org/democracyfund/donors.

In conclusion, net distinctions between liberal and illiberal approaches are mainly functional due to the widespread of the "west versus the rest" narrative failing to capture the inner complexity of the CM/PB domain. In the African region, the idea of a global West and a global East competing for the support of African countries is reductive (Ikenberry, 2024), as it fails to take into account the power constraints and foreign policy priorities of the different state actors. Western and rising powers selectively pick from the same toolbox often converging on the use of a mix of security-led and development-led tools. A more nuanced and entangled reality than that portrayed by some literature is also apparent in that these actors are not always on opposite sides. The case of the CAR is emblematic. In this case, Wagner[13] operatives were reported to have been training local forces while simultaneously pursuing the agenda of EU instructors. This revelation therefore forced the European Commission foreign affairs spokesperson, Peter Stano, to declare that the Union is in no way cooperating with Wagner (Brzozowski & Fox, 2021).

Demand-side/intervened states

The debate on African agency in the CM/PB domain has predominantly focused on how local actors, intended as civil society, resisted and co-opted international (liberal) interventions thereby, contributing to the emergence of hybrid forms of peace (Mac Ginty, 2010; Richmond, 2011; Tieku, 2013). In contrast, national governments are often portrayed as being at the mercy of foreign powers within patron-client relations. Also, in this case however, reality is much more nuanced than one might expect and a more realistic stance must be adopted in order to interpret the role African countries play in shaping intervention strategies. Obamamoye (2023) argues that even before the denouement of the global power asymmetry and the rise of Southern nations increased Africa's role in global politics, the continent had actively contributed to the liberal peace project. In the author's words, the idea that "liberal interventions were summarily Western neo-imperialist campaigns" (Ibidem:1384) ignores the African involvement in spreading the liberal order. He argues that the fact that the overall African peace and security architecture is based on a liberal peace model does not mean that African actors lack agency, but rather that "their agency […] was not immune from the prescriptions and constraints of the superstructures" (Ibidem:1388). From Somalia to South Sudan to the Gambia, one can detect African agency in liberal interventions. However, there is no doubt that the current multipolar (dis)order brought unique opportunities and alternatives for African countries (Ghimire, 2018). Within this scenario, "African elites have proven to be excellent arch-manipulators

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[13] Recently renamed *Africa Corps*.

of the international system" (Brown, 2012:1892), leveraging foreign appetite for their natural resources and political capital. Often, this dynamic is fostered by Western consultants and private companies, which influence the approach of African leaders. The Sahel region offers the best example of extraversion strategies (Tull, 2011; Colomba-Petteng, 2023).

The recent shift from European-led conflict management towards the strengthening of military and diplomatic ties with Russia, Turkey and Saudi Arabia by Sahelian states displays tactical ductility and sensitivity to political costs and strategic opportunity. The choice of Mali, Burkina Faso and more recently Niger, to review their relations with Western players stemmed, at least in part, from the refusal of Brussels to include military supplies and greater military presence as part of their efforts in the region, prompting the three states to search for alternative partners within the CM/PB market (Colomba-Petteng, 2023). However, the widespread anti-Western feeling has deeper roots in what Hedley Bull called "the revolt against the West" (1984). In the context of the Sahel, as in other African regions, there is an emerging contestation of the legacies of Western impacts (colonialism, liberal development model). Nowadays, rulers and public spaces in many African countries criticise the Western claim to speak for everyone while forgetting different historical memories. Chad on the other hand, has been more successful in forcing Europeans, especially France, to maintain their support towards the country. Mahamat Déby, who came to power after an institutional coup - not according to AU - following his father's death in 2021, is consolidating his rule by navigating the new multipolar (dis)order. For more than a decade, the liberal international order (LIO), also known as the rules-based order, has been in deep crisis. Many questions remain about what the international order will look like in the future-whether it will return to multipolarity, establish a new bipolar system, or be dominated by China.

Whatever the future scenario will be, the order is currently in a transitional phase marked by a series of disruptions. In such an international context characterised by multiple actors, many states, such as Chad, consolidate their domestic power by diversifying their partners and threatening to break ties with traditional ones. Déby exploited the instability in neighbouring countries to force Paris and other Western actors, including the United States, to support the domestic transfer of power, despite widespread doubts about his rise to power and his methods of rule. Furthermore, he has also maintained an ambivalent relationship with Russia and deliberately stoked Western fears by providing the media and foreign intelligence with information on Wagner's alleged plots to elevate Chad's status as a key Western ally in Africa (Lacher, 2023).[14] African countries have also been very

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[14] A similar strategy has also been adopted by Ghana (Nyabor, 2023).

active in moulding multilateralism in the continent (Ebo & Powell, 2010; Bala & Tara, 2021). This has been achieved by fostering the regionalisation of conflict management, prioritising the solutions put forward by Regional Economic Communities (RECs), a strategy seen as more legitimate in the eyes of local populations and more pragmatic in their approaches (Herpolsheimer, 2023), and opting for more informal solutions whenever organisational gridlocks prevent the adoption of the most appropriate response to countries' needs. Thus, African countries often rely on regional coalitions or coalitions of the willing, dubbed *Ad-hoc Security Initiatives* (ASIs) to solve their security problems. Significant examples are the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army (RCI-LRA) formed by Uganda and neighbouring states in 2011; the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) dealing with the Boko Haram threat entered into force in 2015; and the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) Joint Force, consisting of troops from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, established in 2017 to fight illegal armed groups (Darkwa & Attuquayefio, 2014).[15]

ASIs lie outside the APSA system. They do not necessitate authorisation from the AU or the UN as their deployment is based on the principles of self-defence (art. 51 of the UN Charter). ASIs provide a flexible instrument aimed at pursuing militias, armed groups, or insurgents deemed a threat through military responses, while neglecting the civilian dimensions and the Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development Policy (PCRD) provisions (Tchie, 2023; De Coning, Tchie & Grand, 2022). Moreover, a tendency to look inwards to resolve disputes and an approach towards empowerment of conflict management has manifested itself in the increasing use of bilateral security supplies, as evidenced by the cases of Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa and Rwanda (Cannon & Donelli, 2023). Since the second decade of the 2000s, there has been a series of military interventions in support of governmental efforts to stabilise territories by countries belonging to the same security complex, such as the Ethiopian (2006-2009) and Kenyan (2011-2012) interventions in Somalia, or Uganda's intervention in South Sudan (2016). In this regard, Rwanda is heralding a major shift, having pursued military operations outside its regional complex in the Central African Republic (2020 – ongoing) and Mozambique from the year 2021 till present (Cannon & Donelli, 2023). These last two cases are also significant in illustrating how intervened countries' extraversion strategies do not always consist of selectively picking between old and new actors in CM/PB, but also from the opposite by refusing to choose sides in order to take advantage of the services offered by multiple actors, thus maximising the impact of foreign intervention. Currently, in CAR, there is a UN stabilisation mission

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[15] After the withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, On 6 December 2023, the remaining members Chad and Mauritania announced the imminent dissolution of the alliance.

(MINUSCA), an EU advisory mission (EUAM CAR) and a military training mission (EUTM CAR), along with Wagner militiamen, and Rwandan troops (Ibidem).

In Mozambique, after the initial resort to the South African private military, the failures of the contractor groups Dyck Advisory Group and Russian Wagner Group followed. The Maputo government simultaneously authorised the deployment of an EU training mission (EUTM Mozambique), a mission of the Southern African Development Community (SAMIM), and the presence of the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF). In Conclusion, Thabo Mbeki's African Renaissance has been effectively substantiated in the journey to finding African solutions for African problems, and in the enhanced agency of African countries in shaping the strategies of intervening countries according to national priorities. The reported turn towards pragmatisms in CM/PB (Karlsrud, 2019) is only partly explained by accounting for (exogenous and endogenous) factors concerning intervening states. Africa's security imperatives and growing unwillingness to indulge in time-wasting negotiations over political reforms have indeed substantially contributed to shaping the supply side towards quick-fixing and pragmatic solutions.

Conclusions

Building on extant literature criticising dualistic readings rooted in Western/liberal and non-Western/illiberal ethos, the research proposed a novel interpretative approach to CM/PB based on a (neo)realist perspective. We describe CM/PB as an assemblage of foreign policy instruments selectively adopted by nation-states regardless of their regime's type and geopolitical affiliation. The choice of the specific combination of instruments in a given scenario stems from both supply and demand-side incentives and constraints, hence, from the strategic environment surrounding state actors to their role within it.

The twofold argument has been proved plausible after critically engaging with relevant literature and available evidence presenting an overview of foreign engagement in the African continent and significant instances of African countries' role in shaping intervention strategies. On the one hand, the net distinction between liberal and illiberal approaches has been discarded with Western and rising powers' shift in global approaches converging on the use of a blend of security-led and development-led instruments. On the other hand, we proved that the pragmatic turn in CM/PB is at least partly attributable to the agency of the intervened states or countries, whose preferences are grounded in security imperatives and regime survival, and have influenced the popularity of one specific

combination of foreign policy instruments. The research, which enhances the literature on peace and conflict studies, normative contestation and African International Relationships, is far from being exhaustive, and instead is rather a first foray into a new agenda. Further research should operationalise the offered interpretative framework to provide a behavioural theory of the responses of state actors in dealing with crisis and conflict situations.

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Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors have reported no potential conflict of interest.

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