International Relations and Diplomacy, July-Aug. 2026, Vol. 14, No. 4, 216-226
doi: 10.17265/2328-2134/2026.04.004

Beyond the Battlefield: The Relevance of Sun Tzu's Art of War to Good Governance in African States

Emmanuel Wekem Kotia
University of Professional Studies, Accra, Ghana

The Art of War, written by the ancient Chinese strategist Sun Tzu, is widely regarded as one of the earliest and most influential works on military strategy. Although originally conceived in the context of warfare, its principles offer enduring insights for contemporary governance and statecraft. This occasional paper examines the relevance of Sun Tzu's teachings to good governance in African states through the lens of Strategic Governance Theory. It analyses how the principles of strategic leadership and long-term planning, intelligence-led governance, conflict prevention, public support, adaptability and flexibility, efficient resource utilisation, and unity of purpose and coordination can enhance effective governance and national resilience. Drawing on examples from African states, the African Union, and ECOWAS, the paper argues that these principles remain relevant to addressing contemporary governance, security, and development challenges across Africa. It concludes that effective governance increasingly requires strategic foresight, informed decision-making, political legitimacy, institutional adaptability, efficient resource management, and coordinated action, making Sun Tzu's strategic philosophy a useful framework for advancing sustainable peace, stability, good governance, and development in African states.

Keywords: Sun Tzu, good governance, strategic governance, leadership, intelligence-led governance, conflict prevention, Africa, national security, public administration, sustainable development

Introduction

Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* offers strategic principles that remain relevant beyond the military sphere, particularly to the pursuit of good governance in African states. Many African countries persistently confront governance challenges, including weak institutions, political instability, corruption, resource constraints, social fragmentation, insecurity, and declining public trust. Although these challenges differ across national contexts, they demonstrate the need for governance approaches that combine foresight, legitimacy, institutional coordination, and efficient implementation. This paper examines Sun Tzu's strategic thought through the lenses of strategic governance theory and statecraft, assessing its relevance to contemporary African governance.

The Strategic Governance Theory emphasises the alignment of leadership, institutions, policies, and resources with clearly defined long-term national objectives. Sun Tzu similarly presents strategy as a disciplined process founded on careful planning, accurate intelligence, environmental awareness, and knowledge of institutional strengths and weaknesses. Applied to African states, these principles support intelligence-led and evidence-based governance, enabling leaders to anticipate risks, identify opportunities, and avoid costly policy failures. The author's view that the highest form of victory is achieved without fighting also underscores the

Emmanuel Wekem Kotia, Ph.D., Adjunct Lecturer, University of Professional Studies, Accra, Ghana.

significance of conflict prevention through dialogue, inclusive institutions, early warning systems, and timely responses to public grievances.

From a statecraft perspective, Sun Tzu recognises public support, moral authority, and unity of purpose as essential sources of state strength. Good governance consequently requires legitimacy, accountability, citizen participation, and coordination among political leaders, public institutions, security agencies, civil society, and local communities. His emphasis on adaptability encourages governments to respond flexibly to changing political, economic, technological, and security conditions, while his warnings against prolonged campaigns highlight the efficient use of limited public resources. This paper argues that, when adapted critically to Africa's diverse constitutional, cultural, and historical contexts, Sun Tzu's teachings provide a useful framework for strategic leadership, preventive governance, institutional coordination, public legitimacy, and sustainable national development.

Theoretical Underpinning: Strategic Governance Theory and Statecraft Perspective

The analysis is based on the Strategic Governance Theory, supported by the timeless rules of statecraft espoused by Sun Tzu in *The Art of War*. From the strategic governance perspective, effective governance extends beyond routine public administration to encompass the capacity of political leadership and state institutions to anticipate emerging threats and opportunities, formulate long-term national objectives, align and mobilise national resources, manage strategic risks, and continuously adapt policies to changing domestic and international circumstances (Monteiro & Dal Borgo, 2023; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2025). This theory resulted from modern scholarship on public governance that acknowledges the fact that governments operate under highly complex, uncertain, and interlinked systems of security, politics, economics, technology, and environment. As such, governance is effective only when it is proactive, founded on evidence-based policymaking, coordination, accountability, resilience, and continuous learning.

According to the Strategic Governance Theory, governments that combine long-term strategic planning with adaptability are more likely to attain sustainable peace, political stability, economic development, and public confidence. The theory emphasises whole-of-government approaches, which promote collaboration among different institutions such as ministries, security institutions, civil society organisations, and the private sector (OECD, 2025; World Bank, 2024a). Under such an approach, governance is a strategic process that involves regular risk assessment, intelligent decision-making, organisational adaptability, and consistent implementation of national policies.

Assumptions of the theory coincide with those of Sun Tzu's strategy and leadership theory. Even though Sun Tzu's authored the book as a guide for military activities, its concepts are applicable to many fields, including governance, public administration, diplomacy, and national leadership. Sun Tzu claims success is based on proper preparation, not reaction; intelligence, not guessing; prevention, not confrontation; and coordination, not fragmentation. The author further believes good leadership tries to avoid conflicts by fully understanding their strengths and the intentions of their opponents through strategic planning (Sun Tzu, 1963).

Sun Tzu's strategy and leadership theory centre on the idea that information and intelligence are the basis for decision-making. For instance, when Sun Tzu states leaders should "know the enemy and know yourself", he illustrates the significance of having knowledge about a situation prior to taking action. In governance, this concept emphasizes the significance of intelligence-based policymaking, forecasting, planning and early warning systems, which enable governments to foresee such political issues as terrorism, cyber-attacks, natural disasters,

criminal activities, and economic crises before such issues escalate into national disasters. Like Sun Tzu, the theory emphasises the best strategy is one that avoids conflict through prevention. Unlike many leaders who glorify their victory on the battlefield, the ideal leader, according to the theory, accomplishes their goals without having to incur the expense of battle. The concept of prevention is similar to the strategies employed by contemporary governance, whereby issues such as mediation, diplomacy, preventive security, disaster risk reduction, social inclusion, and resilience are employed for the protection of the nation.

Another key area of overlap concerns leadership and institutional coordination. According to the Strategic Governance Theory, governance must be efficient to ensure institutional coordination and strategic leadership. Similarly, Sun Tzu highlights the significance of unity of command, discipline coordination, clear responsibilities, and synchronisation of efforts. These aspects align with modern "Whole-of-Government" and "Whole-of-Society" approaches to terrorism, violent extremism, transnational organised crime, cyber insecurity, irregular migration, and environmental insecurity.

Synthesis of the theory proves especially significant to Africa because African governments face growing levels of interconnectedness between the issues of security and development. The threat to national resilience and sustainable development from violent extremism, unconstitutional regime changes, cybercrime, climate change, food insecurity, urbanisation, youth unemployment, corruption, and institutional weakness demands a governance approach that includes strategic vision, adaptability, intelligence, institutional resilience, responsible resource use, and collaborative policymaking. In recent continental policy frameworks, these concepts have been highlighted as being essential preconditions for realising the goals of Agenda 2063 and the African Peace and Security Architecture (African Union (AU) Commission, 2024a).

Strategic Leadership and Long-Term Planning as a Foundation for Good Governance

Strategic leadership and long-term planning are pivotal to good governance in African nations. In line with Sun Tzu's principles, good governance is an aspect dependent on foresight, preparation, and the ability to anticipate future events rather than being driven by crisis management. Strategic leadership entails the creation of a vision for the nation, aligning resources with national priorities and leading institutions to achieve long-term goals.

In the African context, strategic leadership empowers governments to manage a multitude of interlinked challenges such as terrorism, global warming, cybersecurity, economic instability, and poor governance. With adequate strategic planning, countries can sustain policy consistency, allocate resources, coordinate institutions, and increase resilience against future shocks. These strategies shift governance from politics to more fundamental national concerns (African Union Commission, 2024a).

Several African countries exemplify the benefits of strategic leadership and planning. This is evident in Vision 2050 established by the Government of Rwanda, which outlines the process of transforming the country's economy and governance processes by 2050 (Republic of Rwanda, 2020). Similarly, Ghana's national security and development strategies attempt to be proactive and ensure security interests dovetail with the development agenda. At the continental level, the AU's Agenda 2063 is the strategic framework that seeks to make Africa an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful continent (African Union, 2024).

Regarding governance, strategic leadership ensures proactive decision-making and national preparedness; and facilitates early warning systems, preventive measures against security, and scientific policymaking. As Sun Tzu notes, success depends on preparation and anticipation and not reaction. This means that by embracing

strategic leadership and planning, African countries are in a better position to improve governance performance, sustain stability, and realise sustainable development in the contemporary complex world.

Intelligence-Led Governance: Enhancing Good Governance and Strategic Decision-Making

One of the most important teachings of Sun Tzu is the notion that good leadership is dependent on intelligence and prudent decision-making. The author's famous quotation, "Know the enemy and know yourself, and in a hundred battles you will never be defeated" (Sun Tzu, 1963, p. 84), suggests victory is attained through better knowledge and not better power. In public administration, knowledge becomes the base of intelligence-led governance, which presupposes the government collects, analyses and uses reliable information to predict possible challenges, adopt policy measures, allocate funds efficiently, and prevent crises. Instead of responding to an event once it happens, intelligence-led governance allows governments to make prior sound judgements.

In line with the Strategic Governance Theory, intelligence does not apply exclusively to the activities of the security apparatuses alone, but it becomes a governmentwide capacity applied in strategic planning and coordination among government institutions. This means intelligence includes political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and security information which deepens decision-makers' understanding of emerging trends and how such trends may affect the development of the country (Robinson & Doherty, 2025). Intelligence incorporated into policymaking enables governments to identify weaknesses, predict strengths, and coordinate policies to enhance governance outcomes.

This theory is like Sun Tzu's views on the role of intelligence in the decision-making process. The author stresses leaders who depend on assumptions, feelings, and inaccurate intelligence expose themselves to avoidable danger, while leaders with accurate intelligence control events and manipulate situations to their advantage prior to the occurrence of crises. Modern governance requires accurate intelligence to address national security, economic planning, disaster management, public health management, cybersecurity, and the adaptation to climate change.

Intelligence-led governance remains significant, especially in Africa where governments face complex security challenges such as terrorism, transnational crime, cybercrime, irregular migration, pandemics, and climate-induced insecurity. The AU's Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) and ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) have been established to provide early warning information to help in preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention decision-making throughout Africa. These examples represent the use of Sun Tzu's preventive philosophy as governments can detect and address security threats before such escalate into large-scale conflicts (African Union, 2025).

At the national level, Ghana can provide examples of intelligence-led governance. The formulation of the 2020 National Security Strategy and the integration of intelligence-coordinating mechanisms into the Security and Intelligence Agencies Act, 2026 (Act 1168) are illustrative of the growing acceptance of the fact that national security strategies must be formulated through coordinated intelligence assessment (Government of Ghana, 2020; 2026). Similarly, Kenya employs intelligence-driven strategies to counter terrorism through improved coordination among security and intelligence agencies, whereas Rwanda is gradually adopting evidence-based governance in delivering services to citizens (Government of Kenya, 2024; National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2025; Rwanda Information Society Authority, 2025). Such examples indicate intelligence plays a crucial role not only in national security, but also in governance, policy coordination, and institutional stability.

Finally, Sun Tzu's philosophy confirms the contemporary concept of good governance requires intelligence from governments. In this case, governments that possess systems of intelligence, strategy, warning, and information exchange are better prepared to manage crises, defend their interests, allocate resources efficiently, and maintain trust among people.

Conflict Prevention Rather Than Conflict Resolution

One main principle of Sun Tzu's teachings is the notion that the ultimate level of success is avoiding war rather than winning it. The phrase, "To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill", indicates the focus of modern government on preventing rather than solving conflicts (Sun Tzu, 1963, p. 77). Whereas conflict resolution is concerned with the management and cessation of violence, conflict prevention deals with managing the factors that trigger instability before they lead to crises. This approach has gained more relevance in Africa, since violent conflicts are a major threat to governance, development, and state stability.

Conflict prevention encompasses a broad range of political, economic, social, and security policies geared towards addressing the root causes of conflict, such as political marginalisation, poverty, inequality, institutional weaknesses, resource competition, and grievances (United Nations, 2023). By addressing challenges at their source rather than dealing with the effects, conflict prevention becomes a much more effective and sustainable mechanism of ensuring peace and security. Within the continent, conflict prevention has become a fundamental pillar of peace and security. This is evident in the efforts by the CEWS and the ECOWARN (African Union Commission, 2023; ECOWAS Commission, 2023). These processes have equipped governments and regional bodies to identify potential conflicts prior to escalation. A successful conflict prevention effort in Ghana is the involvement of the National Peace Council in resolving disputes among the political players, especially in the political process. Preventive engagement, mediation, peace pledges, and consensus-building are some of the processes that have made these efforts possible (Government of Ghana, 2011; National Development Planning Commission, 2025). Likewise, strategies designed to combat violent extremism in the Sahel region have focused on prevention by tackling challenges such as marginalisation, youth unemployment, and poor governance that led to radicalisation and recruitment (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2023).

Conflict prevention is also key to promoting good governance through the involvement of all people in the political processes, ensuring social cohesion and citizens' trust in government bodies. Governments that respond to citizens' complaints in a responsible and accountable manner are unlikely to become victims of instability and conflicts. In other words, conflict prevention is closely related to the approaches of human security and security sector governance that focus on addressing underlying causes of insecurity (DCAF, 2023a).

Therefore, conflict prevention can be said to be an anticipatory form of governance, which resonates with Sun Tzu's strategic approach in terms of anticipation, preparedness, and engagement. Through such approaches as early warning, preventive diplomacy, good governance, and peacebuilding, African countries can avoid conflicts, sustain development gains, and achieve sustainable peace and stability.

Winning Public Support: Legitimacy and Good Governance in African States

One basic concept in Sun Tzu's philosophy is that the basis of long-term success lies not just in strength and the use of force but also in winning the backing and faith of the people. Sun Tzu stresses the point that successful leadership can be exercised by legitimacy and the interests of citizens (1963). In modern governance, public support is a principle that is reflected by the significance of public trust, citizen involvement, transparency,

accountability, and responsive leadership. Governments that have public support tend to be more stable, efficient, and resilient compared to governments that lack such attributes as they suffer from political instability, social unrest, and governance challenges.

Public support concerns governments obtaining legitimacy and public trust through good governance, service delivery, rule of law, and citizen participation in political affairs. Political legitimacy plays a pivotal role in state power as it leads to higher voluntary compliance with laws and policies, lower governance costs, and greater social cohesion (Arif & Dutta, 2024; OECD, 2023; 2025). Public backing in democracies often comes through the notion that the state acts in the best interest of its citizens and is accountable to them.

In Africa, public backing becomes especially crucial since most of the current security and development challenges cannot be addressed through coercive force alone. Addressing extremism, communal violence, election-related violence, public health emergencies, and climate-induced insecurity demands the cooperation of both the government and the citizenry (Afrobarometer, 2024a).

Another avenue through which states can win the support of citizens is good governance characterised by transparency and accountability. Governments that are responsible in managing state resources, fighting corruption, and upholding the rule of law tend to enjoy the support of citizens. As Africa improves governance, governments generally enjoy greater trust from citizens. For instance, Botswana, Mauritius, Senegal, and Ghana are ranked relatively higher in terms of governance and democracy because of the relevance they attach to governance and accountability (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2024).

Public trust plays a vital role in ensuring governance stability in South Africa, Senegal, Rwanda, and many other African countries. Certain African nations have improved their democratic structures, reliable election process, civil society participation, and media that have helped in building public trust in governance structure (Afrobarometer, 2024b; International IDEA, 2024). Despite these issues with governance, public participation in elections and discussion processes has enhanced democratic legitimacy and peaceful transitions.

Building public confidence is also related to inclusive governance. Governments that encourage political participation, safeguard minority rights, and provide equal development opportunities tend to build a cohesive nation. On the other hand, political and social exclusion usually produces grievances that result in insecurity and conflicts. Studies on state fragility in Africa invariably emphasise the role of exclusionary governance and inequalities in political unrest and violence (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2024).

The relevance of popular support is not only related to governance but also to national security. National security institutions require active cooperation from the population for such activities as intelligence, crime prevention, counter terrorism, and community security programmes. Higher levels of trust in the community enhance information flow and better result in the operations of the security services. Lack of trust between the population and government structures leads to failure in security measures and provides a fertile ground for extremism and organised crime. Moreover, there has been a growing significance of public approval within governance because of the evolution of digital communication and social media. Citizens have become more informed and can air their opinions. Good governance understands the necessity for strategic communication and public participation in the process. Transparent communication is significant during such periods as elections and pandemics.

However, winning and maintaining popular support is no easy task for many African governments. Such persistent challenges as corruption, joblessness, poverty, poor service delivery, and poor governance potentially

affect popular trust and the legitimacy of government institutions. Improving democratic institutions, accountability, development, and the involvement of citizens in governance processes requires constant effort.

Adaptability and Flexibility: Enhancing Governance Resilience in African States

Sun Tzu's philosophy emphasises flexibility and adaptability, stressing a good leader must be ready to change strategies based on evolving situations. Sun Tzu's statement that water behaves differently depending on the type of terrain serves to illustrate the need for flexibility depending on the environment (McNeilly, 2015; Sun Tzu, 2007). Adaptability, as used in modern governance, refers to the ability of governments and institutions to anticipate, respond to, and learn from new challenges, while flexibility refers to the ability of adapting to the environment regarding policies and strategies. The two help achieve effective governance and build resilience among institutions.

Adaptability has become more relevant in Africa due to the complex challenges faced by the continent, including terrorism, cyberattack, climate change, pandemics, organised crime, and economic instability. In many cases, traditional governance systems have proved insufficient for addressing such multifaceted challenges (OECD, 2023). Adaptive governance makes it possible for states to go past reactive governance and adopt a more proactive approach in dealing with uncertainty. Governments around the world faced the challenge of flexibility during COVID-19. Such countries as Nigeria, Rwanda, Ghana, Senegal, and South Africa quickly adapted to their new circumstances and adopted new approaches that would help them handle the crisis (World Health Organization, 2020; 2021; 2022; 2025). Similarly, measures to counter violent extremism have changed from being largely military in nature to more holistic ones that include governance, socio-economic development programmes, and community involvement in addressing the underlying challenges of insecurity (UNDP, 2023).

In addressing climate change issues, flexibility is another crucial factor. In Africa, governments have incorporated the element of climate resilience in development policies, disaster management and security issues to combat the effects of droughts, floods and resource conflicts (UNDP, 2024).

Regarding governance, adaptability enhances the capacity of organisations by virtue of their capability to endure and recover from disturbances and continue to operate efficiently despite the changes. This results in policymaking grounded on facts (World Bank, 2024b). Therefore, countries which embrace adaptability and flexibility are positioned to ensure stability and overcome emerging challenges while meeting sustainable development goals.

Efficient Use of Resources: A Pillar of Good Governance

Efficiency in resource allocation is another principle Sun Tzu teaches. According to the author, the key to success lies in the prudent and proper use of available resources rather than in the arbitrary use of same. On military strategy, Sun Tzu asserts long campaigns are resource-consuming activities that weaken nations (Sun Tzu, 2007). The author, therefore, argues for economic planning and the efficient use of human capital, money, logistics, and intelligence to obtain maximum advantage at the lowest cost possible. This is an issue pertinent in current governance, which requires governments to provide citizens with quality services despite limited financial and other institutional capacity. Efficient public resource management is, therefore, an application of Sun Tzu's principle of public financial management, evidence-based policymaking, and accountability.

Efficient resource management entails efficient allocation and use of financial, human, technological and natural resources (World Bank, 2024c). Good governance demands that states allocate resources in line with their

priorities, such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, agriculture, energy, and national security. These are tenets of result-based management, which are based on achieving measurable goals, performance evaluation, and value for money. States that effectively manage resources are better positioned to achieve efficiency in service delivery, institutional building, promotion of economic growth and boosting public confidence in state institutions. In turn, resource efficiency has emerged as a major indicator of good governance and effectiveness of states in Africa.

Many African states have initiated reforms to promote efficient resource management and improve performance of the public sector. For instance, in Rwanda, the Imihigo performance contract system was introduced to measure institutional performance in terms of national development goals (World Bank, 2023). The performance-driven approach has helped improve service delivery, institutional efficiency, and responsiveness in the public sector. Additionally, other African countries have instituted various reforms in public financial management, online revenue collection, and electronic procurement, all with the aim of improving budget discipline, transparency, and accountability of public funds (International Monetary Fund, 2024). These reform efforts are indicative of the growing recognition that good governance involves not merely the presence of resources but the sound management of same.

Efficient resource management is also critical in the security sectors, where governments are increasingly assuming security roles while facing financial constraints. Modern-day security challenges, including terrorism, cybercrime, transnational crime, piracy, climate-related catastrophes, and cyber threats, require governments to effectively manage scarce financial and operational resources. This is the rationale behind the concept of Security Sector Governance (DCAF, 2023b). Efficiency in intelligence application, technology, and joint operations allows for the attainment of more operational efficiency without duplicating the capacities of the organisations involved.

In addition to monetary issues, Sun Tzu's philosophy emphasises innovation and technology can be applied to enhance efficiency. In Africa, digital reforms such as the introduction of e-government, digital identity, tax integration, and mobile payments have made service provision much cheaper and more efficient (United Nations, 2024). Similarly, the sustainable management of resources such as minerals, forests, fisheries, and energy has become a crucial issue in ensuring economic growth is linked to national development as opposed to exploitation. The proper management of these resources enhances fiscal sustainability without causing environmental degradation or inequalities in society.

However, despite such progress, several constraints hinder efficient resource management in many African countries. These constraints include corruption, lack of capacity, fragmented planning process, political patronage, irregular procurement, and lack of evaluation and monitoring (Transparency International, 2024). Tackling the constraints requires improved anti-corruption institutions, improved legislative and audit oversight, public administration based on merit, modern financial management systems, and increased citizen participation in budgeting processes.

Finally, Sun Tzu's teachings regarding economy, frugality, and strategic management have timeless lessons for contemporary governance. Efficient resource utilisation goes beyond mere financial efficiency and is a strategic approach that allows governments to achieve better national results even with limited resources. With enhanced management of public finances, accountability, technology, and strategic resource utilisation, African countries improve governance efficiency, strengthen national resilience, boost citizen trust, and promote sustainable development. This way, efficient utilisation of national resources becomes one of the most practical applications of Sun Tzu's strategic lessons.

Strengthening Governance Effectiveness Through the Unity of Purpose and Coordination

The ideas of unity of purpose and coordination play a crucial role in Sun Tzu's theory, which suggests success presupposes the harmonious integration of state structures and resources in achieving strategic goals. Sun Tzu states victory is reached when leaders organise all aspects of development in accordance with a strategy (Sun Tzu, 2007). However, fragmentation, lack of communication, conflicting interests, and uncoordinated activities undermine state effectiveness, result in inefficiencies, and negate strategic objectives. In modern governance contexts, such tenets are evident in policy coherence, inter-departmental collaboration, and Whole-of-Government approach, which facilitates collective action by organisations towards common objectives. Considering the growing interrelatedness and complexity of modern governance challenges, the lessons in harmony and coordination offered by Sun Tzu remain pertinent.

Unity of purpose refers to harmonisation of national vision, policies, mandates of institutions, and implementation strategies towards defined objectives, while coordination is a process of organised cooperation of different government ministries, security services, local government agencies, civil society, private sector, and international actors. These two principles make governance more effective through better information sharing, optimised resource allocation, avoidance of overlapping, and coherent policy implementation (OECD, 2023). Addressing contemporary security and development issues, such as terrorism, violent extremism, cybercrime, climate change, epidemics, irregular migration, and transnational organised crime, exceeds the mandate of a single organisation, hence, the need for integration, coordination, and cooperation among various organisations.

In the case of Africa, the need exists for coordination, especially in the security sector, since national security requires coordination among intelligence agencies, armed forces, police, immigration, customs, emergency services, among others. A good example is that of Ghana where the national security system was developed in line with the National Security Strategy (2020) and the Security and Intelligence Agencies Act, 2026 (Act 1168). The mechanisms, which include the National Security Council, Regional Security Councils, District Security Councils, Joint Intelligence Committees, and Joint Operations Committees, facilitate intelligence sharing, plan coordination, and response coordination to confront security threats (Government of Ghana, 2020).

However, the concept of unity of purpose is not confined to individual nations but applies to regional governance as well. The AU's Africa Peace and Security Architecture and the ECOWAS' conflict prevention and early warning systems provide examples in this regard (African Union Commission, 2024b). Similarly, the successful implementation of Agenda 2063, AfCFTA (African Continental Free Trade Area), and regional anti-terror measures is dependent on continuous cooperation among national governments, regional economic communities, development partners, civil societies, and the private sector (African Continental Free Trade Area Secretariat, 2024; African Union Commission, 2024c). This coordination allows for collective action for cross-border issues in addition to fostering regional integration and economic development.

Despite its significance, coordination is hindered in most African countries due to such factors as bureaucratic rivalry, competing mandates of organisations, lack of an interoperable information system, politics, lack of inter-operability, and poor communication mechanisms. Such obstacles lead to challenges such as policy contradictions, inefficiencies in decision-making and resource utilization, and decreased credibility of government institutions. Overcoming such hurdles requires visionary leadership, clarity in institutional mandates, interoperable information system, joint planning and training sessions, sound laws, and public sector culture oriented towards collaboration rather than competition among institutions.

Conclusion

Though *The Art of War* is primarily written as a military strategy book, its teachings remain much applicable to contemporary governance issues. As has been analysed, Sun Tzu's teachings on strategic leadership, intelligence-driven decisions, conflict prevention, popular support, adaptability, efficiency in resource management and coordination are crucial in confronting governance challenges in Africa.

The analysis indicates good governance is becoming more reliant on foresight, decision-making, institutional resilience, legitimacy, and coordination than simply reacting to security and governance happenings. This aligns with modern governance approach where stability, security, and sustainable development are sought through proactive policies.

The experiences of African states in general and regional organisations such as the AU, ECOWAS and Southern Africa Development Cooperation offer practical examples to prove the relevance of these principles regarding improving governance and making nations resilient. Considering the concepts of Strategic Governance Theory, Sun Tzu's guidance offers a good perspective to consider the nature of governance as a strategic process.

References

African Continental Free Trade Area Secretariat. (2024). *AfCFTA implementation strategy 2024-2028*.

African Union. (2024). *Agenda 2063: The Africa we want*. Addis Ababa: African Union Commission.

African Union. (2025). *Continental Early Warning System (CEWS): African peace and security architecture*. Retrieved from https://www.aupaps.org/en/page/200-early-warning

African Union Commission. (2023). *Report on the African peace and security architecture and the continental early warning system*. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission. (2024a). *African Union handbook 2024*. Addis Ababa: African Union.

African Union Commission. (2024b). *African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA): Roadmap 2021-2030 implementation progress*. African Union.

African Union Commission. (2024c). *Agenda 2063: Second ten-year implementation plan (2024-2033)*. Addis Ababa: African Union Commission.

Afrobarometer. (2024a). *Africans' views on democracy, governance and public trust: Pan-African profile*. Accra: Afrobarometer.

Afrobarometer. (2024b). Afrobarometer round 10: Pan-African profile. Afrobarometer. /International IDEA. (2024). *The global state of democracy 2024: Strengthening the legitimacy*.

Arif, I., & Dutta, N. (2024). Legitimacy of government and governance. *Journal of Institutional Economics, 20*, e14.

DCAF. (2023a). *Security sector governance and conflict prevention in Africa*. Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance.

DCAF. (2023b). *Security sector governance and reform: Applying governance principles to the security sector*. Geneva: Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance.

ECOWAS Commission. (2023). *ECOWARN operational framework and conflict prevention mechanisms*. Abuja: ECOWAS Commission.

Government of Ghana. (2011). *National Peace Council Act, 2011 (Act 818)*. Accra: Ghana Publishing Company.

Government of Ghana. (2020). *National security strategy*. Accra: Ministry of National Security.

Government of Ghana. (2026). *Security and Intelligence Agencies Act, 2026 (Act 1168)*. Accra: Ghana Gazette.

Government of Kenya. (2024). *Annual report on the state of national security 2024*. National Security Council, Republic of Kenya.

International Monetary Fund. (2024). *Ghana: 2024 Article IV consultation—Press release; staff report; and statement by the executive director for Ghana*. Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund.

McNeilly, M. (2015). *Sun Tzu and the art of business: Six strategic principles for managers* (revised ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mo Ibrahim Foundation. (2024). *2024 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG)*. London: Mo Ibrahim Foundation.

Monteiro, B., & Dal Borgo, R. (2023). Supporting decision making with strategic foresight: An emerging framework for proactive and prospective governments. *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance, No. 63*. Pair: OECD Publishing.

National Development Planning Commission. (2025). *Ghana's first biennial report under the Glasgow Climate Pact*. Accra:

Government of Ghana.

National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda. (2025). *Fourth National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS4), 2024-2029*. Kigali, Rwanda: National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2023). *Government at a glance 2023*. Pair: OECD Publishing.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2025). *Towards anticipatory governance guidelines for public sector organisations*. Pair: OECD Publishing.

Republic of Rwanda. (2020). *Vision 2050*. Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Rwanda.

Robinson, D. K. R., & Doherty, D. (2025). Strategic intelligence tools for emerging technology governance: A policy primer. *OECD Science, Technology and Industry Working Papers, No. 2025/22*. Pair: OECD Publishing.

Rwanda Information Society Authority. (2025). *National data sharing policy*. Kigali, Rwanda: Rwanda Information Society Authority.

Sun Tzu. (1963). *The art of war* (S. B. Griffith, Trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Original work published ca. 5th century BCE)

Transparency International. (2024). *Corruption perceptions index 2024*. Berlin: Transparency International.

United Nations. (2023). *Our common agenda: Prevention and sustaining peace*. New York: United Nations.

United Nations. (2024). *E-government survey 2024: Accelerating digital transformation for sustainable development*. New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2023). *Journey to extremism in Africa: Pathways to recruitment and prevention*. New York: UNDP.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2024). *Human development report 2023/2024: Breaking the gridlock*. New York: UNDP.

World Bank. (2023). *Rwanda systematic country diagnostic update: Seizing opportunities for resilient and inclusive growth*. World Bank.

World Bank. (2024a). *World development report 2024: The middle-income trap*. Washington DC: World Bank.

World Bank. (2024b). *Governance and development in Africa: Building resilient institutions*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

World Bank. (2024c, June 11). *Reimagining public finance* [Brief]. Retrieved from https://www.worldbank.org/en/brief/2024/06/11/reimagining-public-finance

World Health Organization. (2020). *COVID-19 strategy update—14 April 2020*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

World Health Organization. (2021). *COVID-19 strategic preparedness and response plan (SPRP 2021)* (WHO reference number: WHO-WHE-2021.02). Geneva: World Health Organization.

World Health Organization. (2022). *Strategic preparedness, readiness and response plan to end the global COVID-19 emergency in 2022* (WHO reference number: WHO/WHE/SPP/2022.1). Geneva: World Health Organization.

World Health Organization. (2025). *Strategic plan for coronavirus disease threat management: Advancing integration, sustainability, and equity, 2025-2030*. Geneva: World Health Organization.