

Issues Paper for the African Union Symposium

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The African Union and Peace and Security

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THE AFRICAN UNION AND PEACE AND SECURITY

This Issues Paper is intended to identify some of the principal issues surrounding the role of the African Union in promoting regional peace and security. It asks three basic questions:

1. What are the substantive requirements for establishing regional peace and security in Africa? This question needs to be addressed at both regional and national levels.
2. What are the institutional requirements for establishing such an order?
3. How can a comprehensive approach be developed?

Substantive Requirements: Regional Level

A sustainable peace and security order across Africa requires the establishment of a ‘security community’ in Africa, that is, a community that transcends international boundaries in which the settlement of disputes by anything other than peaceful means is unthinkable. This is more than an inter-state order that formally outlaws aggression and other forms of conflict, and amounts to a complex inter-relationship between all branches of governments, civil society, the private sector, and citizens themselves. Examples of ‘security communities’ in the modern world include Western Europe, North America, and the majority of the South East Asia.

These regional groupings achieved their common security by a number of different routes. For example, the European experience has been based on complex institutional linkages between states and between them and regional and subregional organisations, with a plethora of monitoring institutions, an explicit commitment to human rights and good governance, and a major role for civil society. In the countries of ASEAN, by comparison, the relationships have been at the level of states and the private sector, with relatively little of the complex institutional architecture that characterises European integration.

The situation in Africa today poses a number of theoretical and practical challenges about which model to pursue. While the formal structures of the African Union replicate those of the European Union, the conditions under which African countries are moving towards unity are very different to those prevailing in Europe. Hence, it is important to ask a number of questions about what is necessary to put in place to create an African ‘security community’ as a precondition for unity.

1. What are the preconditions in terms of internal peace within states that are part of a security community? Specifically, is prevailing internal peace an essential precondition for an inter-state security order? Or can internal conflicts be bypassed, or perhaps internal peace and inter-state security should be developed simultaneously? And, secondly, should internal conflicts within states be regarded as solely a domestic issue or as a question of international concern and engagement?
2. What are the preconditions in terms of an inter-state power order? Specifically, does a security community require an established inter-state power hierarchy (which can take various forms), and what can be done in the absence of this? It is important to note that

European security was driven by the concerns of two dominant European states—Germany and France—under the umbrella of NATO, led by the U.S. Do African countries recognise and accept a comparable role for hegemonic states?

3. What are the preconditions in terms of democracy, civil society and demilitarisation? Can a security community be established between authoritarian governments, or does it require the engagement of an active, democratic civil society?
4. What is the sequencing of establishing a security community? Specifically, if the above preconditions are not fully met, is it possible for international organisations to take the lead in establishing a security community? In short, can the African Union and its related institutions press for a security community to be established from above?

Substantive Requirements: National Security

Specialists define ‘national security’ in many different ways. There are many overlapping issues including arms availability and proliferation, nature of governance, contested control of economic and natural resources, conflicting ideologies, ethnic divisions, etc. Most African governments have narrow definitions of security, based on considerations of military defence and regime stability.

Security threats are both internal and external. It no longer makes sense to make a clear-cut distinction between ‘internal’ and ‘international’ wars: virtually all conflicts in Africa contain elements of both. Threats are both immediate and long term. Unfortunately, responding to short-term threats in ad hoc military ways can exacerbate long-term threats such as poverty, weak governance structures and the grievances of victims of abuses

One of the contributory causes of insecurity is the fact that governments in Africa are unpredictable. A destabilising action can come about through calculable ‘raison d’etat’ such as the presence of an insurgent force on a country’s border. Or the spark for an outbreak of war can be something wholly unexpected, such as the personal whim of a leader. Many African governments are dominated by small elite groups that run their countries in a secretive and authoritarian manner. For these ruling groups, national security is not something to be discussed in the public arena. This secrecy contributes to insecurity in the long term, by making governments less predictable and making decision-making more centralised and militarised.

Underlying reasons for insecurity include poverty and thus conflict over scarce resources, vulnerability to external economic shocks, weak institutions (further weakened by HIV/AIDS), and poor governance. However, under militarised governance and with mostly short-term thinking, these are not seen as ‘national security’ issues and are considered a lower priority than military and security affairs.

Underpinning these weaknesses is the absence of a clear strategy for promoting national security in most countries. Countries that have identified their national security threats, and developed clear and transparent mechanisms for responding to them, are more stable and predictable. In addition, as countries move towards a correct identification of their national security challenges, they identify a wider range of threats, many of them longer-term ones that need to be dealt with by non-military means. Threats to national security, real and potential, include, among others:

1. Actual and potential external threats of force projection (invasion);
2. External threats of destabilisation and terrorism;
3. Potential sources of conflict with neighbours such as undemarcated borders, contested natural resource control;
4. Violent crime and banditry associated with proliferation of light weapons;

5. Potential social unrest associated with economic recession;
6. Ethnic, religious and regional cleavages and the incapacity of governance structures to manage disputes peacefully;
7. Insufficiently institutionalised constitutional order;
8. Weak governance institutions and corruption;
9. Mass distress migration due to natural and man-made calamities;
10. HIV/AIDS and its impact on institutions and capacities including security services.

There are sceptics who argue that African governments are incapable of defining their national security interests. Their arguments are that the militarised mentality and selfish behaviour characteristic of some governments, will lead to leaders invariably resorting to force to try to resolve issues that are better addressed through longer-term diplomatic processes. Such approaches need to be supplanted by strategic enlightened self-interest, based on the assumption that national security is best pursued by common security. Sceptics contend that African states have yet to prove themselves capable of pursuing their interests in this way. It is for African leaders to prove them wrong.

A Peace and Security Architecture

Currently, the process of creating the African Union involves a number of intergovernmental initiatives, including (at a regional level) the OAU Conflict Management Centre, the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA), and the peace and security component of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). At a subregional level, subregional organisations, also known as Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have taken the de facto lead in promoting peace and security.

At present, the main question is, can Africa's existing intergovernmental institutions play a leading role in promoting a security community (or communities) in the continent? The obstacles they face are formidable.

1. The problems are severe and complex, and the institutions are weak. While ASEAN benefited from strong, stable states, and Europe had both capable states and strong inter-governmental institutions, Africa has neither.
2. There are strong vested interests in international organisations not developing sufficient autonomy to exercise real influence. Many governments, both African and non-African, prefer to bypass regional and subregional organisations, and even sometimes undermine their efforts. Many African governments are also possessive of their sovereign privileges, and are thus averse both to surrendering any powers and to the implications of 'variable geometry' approaches to inter-state activities.
3. The relationships between the OAU and subregional organisations is unclear. To date, there has been no disciplined approach to managing these relationships. For example there is no forum solely for the senior executive officers of the OAU and subregional organisations to meet and coordinate their strategies: this has been left to ad hoc initiatives.
4. The formal mandates and resolutions of Africa's organisations are not matched by genuine collective commitments and capacities for monitoring or implementing these resolutions. There is an imbalance between form and substance. This is not a problem if the realities are regularly catching up with the aspirations after a time lag, but in the case of Africa, this is often not the case.

5. Most of the organisations are not situated at a nexus of power. That is, they are neither backed by a dominant power, nor are they a critical intermediary in the mediation of power relations.
6. The roles and responsibilities of Africa's major subregional powers need examination. How should these countries be simultaneously empowered to play a larger positive role, while also being constrained from exercising hegemony? This entails deepening relationships between states.
7. There has not been systematic learning within Africa of experiences in peace and security. There are many ad hoc reviews at national, subregional and regional levels, but these have not been integrated into a common exercise of building consensus.
8. A doctrine of military intervention does not yet exist at a continental level. Africa has experience of regional enforcement, notably by ECOWAS and SADC, but their interventions have encountered serious political problems as well as difficulties in seeing operations through to a successful conclusion. Both doctrine and capacities for this kind of intervention need attention. A doctrine will need to address the questions of what kinds of situation warrant intervention, plus the roles and mandates of different subregional, regional and international organisations.
9. Most enforcement capacities remain elsewhere. For mediating the most difficult problems and implementing peace agreements, Africa looks to Europe and the U.S. (sometimes bilaterally, sometimes under a UN umbrella). To date, this has been done solely on an ad hoc basis, without a coordinated analysis of how the relations between African intergovernmental organisations and the UN are interfacing.

This is a daunting list. What we see is not planned architecture but an amalgam of ad hoc initiatives, and stand alone institutions. Some work, others do not. Institutional coherence, coordination and learning is poor.

However, the very multiplicity of institutions and initiatives indicates the high degree of concern about the issue of peace and security in Africa. The resolutions of these organisations, the direction in which they are evolving, and even their very existence, marks an emergent consensus about the importance of containing and resolving armed conflict across Africa. One of the priorities for the objective preconditions for security in Africa is creating a synergy between the existing institutions, enabling them to complement and support one another.

Given the lack of real power in regional and subregional organisations, much of the focus must be on developing the subjective conditions for security cooperation, namely developing common understandings of security and enriching the moral consensus against armed conflict and unconstitutional means of acquiring power. This should be done simultaneously at the national, subregional and regional levels. This exercise should involve setting continental standards for security cooperation.

Meanwhile, there are also some specific measures that can assist making this institutional architecture into an operational reality. Some include the following:

1. Building the capacities for understanding, analysing and warning of conflicts among African institutions (governmental, intergovernmental and civil society). Part of this agenda is 'seminar diplomacy', focussing on building and disseminating a body of knowledge about conflict, conflict resolution, democratisation, etc., among key players.

2. Monitoring and following up commitments made, and at the minimum, documenting those who have failed to live up to their promises. The establishment and reassertion of moral norms can (slowly) contribute to changes in state behaviour.
3. Working out relationships between the UN, OAU/AU, regional and subregional organisations and initiatives, so that they work in complementary ways. Much can be done in terms of mutual learning, and formal and informal networking and information sharing.
4. Finding means of engaging with civil society initiatives, so that they complement and augment inter-state processes.
5. Promoting constitutional rule in Africa. Already the OAU/AU has resolved that unconstitutional transfers of power will not be recognised. Standards for constitutional rule need to be set and continually raised.

Given the absence of real mechanisms for enforcement in the hands of African institutions, much of the work for the foreseeable future must consist in developing consensus, thereby promoting the subjective conditions for a possible peace and security order.

Towards a Comprehensive Strategy

There is no single strategy that can provide peace and security to Africa. Strategies should focus on the different stages of conflict, namely conflict prevention and peace-building, conflict resolution and containment, and post-conflict reconstruction. Strategies also need to be undertaken simultaneously at local, civil society, national and regional levels, in the social, political, military and economic spheres. Strategies need to be simultaneously 'objective', dealing with the substantive issues and the institutional mechanisms for responding, and 'subjective', in developing the awareness, understanding and expectations of leaders at all levels. They need to move beyond purely military definitions of security to more comprehensive and strategic visions.

The following three tables summarise some of the kinds of activities that can be undertaken.

Conflict prevention and peace-building

	<i>Military</i>	<i>Political</i>	<i>Economic</i>
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Teaching of non-military values in schools. * Promoting inter-communal dialogue. * Small arms control. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Maintenance of effective dispute resolution mechanisms. * Empowerment of women and youth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Management of common resources in a way so as to minimise conflict potential. * Provision of work, education opportunities for youth.
Civil society/ private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Engagement of civil society stakeholders in public debate on security issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Promotion of civil and political rights, transparency and good governance. * Inclusion of all constituencies, promotion of gender equity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * NGO/CBO promotion of service provision, sustainable development. * Good corporate citizenship.
National political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Limited use of emergency measures. * No proliferation of special forces or militias. * Transparency about military spending. * Civilian control of the military and security services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Equitable representation of different ethnic/religious/social groups in government. * Devolution of powers. * Freedom of movement and regional citizenship. * Respect for constitutionalism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Adequate remuneration for soldiers, including health care and pensions. * Limitations on military spending. * Controls on military and security involvement in commerce.
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Confidence-building measures between countries such as publishing national military budgets and troop levels. * Creation of credible regional intervention forces. * Development of national and regional security doctrines to promote predictability and transparency in inter-state relations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Promotion of norms of good governance, utilising peer pressure. * Establishment and development of regional fora for dialogue and dispute management. * Regional civil society organisations also have roles in this regard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Functioning of regional mechanisms and institutions for e.g. management of shared riparian resources, cross-border pastures. * Promotion of intra-regional trade
International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Development of credible international intervention forces. * Training for military, police, security services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Enhancement of conflict early-warning and timely intervention systems. * Support to civil society initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Increased predictability, mutual accountability in aid relations. * Increased support to key social sectors.

Conflict resolution and containment

	<i>Military</i>	<i>Political</i>	<i>Economic</i>
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * For local conflicts, traditional moral restraints on conflict can be invoked. * For national conflicts, less is possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * For local conflicts communities can invoke adapted traditional dispute resolution mechanisms. * For national conflicts, little can be done. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Promotion of fair and equitable access to and control over local resources.
Civil society/ private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * For local conflicts, civil society initiatives are possible. * For national conflicts, very little is possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Human rights monitoring. * Advocacy for peace (where possible). * Promotion of dialogue across conflict lines, e.g. contact with counterpart groups on the 'other side.' * Promotion of dialogue on post-conflict issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Provision of assistance to people affected by war. * Observance of business codes of conduct, especially regarding human rights.
National political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Measures to ensure respect for the Geneva Conventions and provide humanitarian access to war-affected populations. * Ceasefire, augmented by mechanisms for monitoring. * Mechanisms for separation of forces, creation of security zones, encampment, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Proximity talks; preparatory talks, high-level talks, adoption of common values and principles: all the modalities for mediation available, either bilateral, facilitated or mediated. * Political liberalisation, opening up space for civil society. * Increased respect for human rights and humanitarian principles/ promotion of culture of peace. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Avoidance or minimisation of military and security involvement in commerce.
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Restrictions on arms flows, prohibition on use of military bases in neighbouring countries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Measures to contain the conflict and prevent its spreading to neighbouring countries. * In regional conflicts, the range of peace initiatives outlined above. * Facilitation or mediation of peace talks of various kinds. * Regional CSOs can support or augment national CSO efforts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Monitoring and controlling illegal export of commodities from the affected country. * Assistance to refugees, combined with protection, demilitarisation of refugee camps etc.
International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Monitoring adherence to IHL. * Arms embargoes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Carrots and sticks to encourage the parties towards negotiation. * Support to community-based and civil society initiatives. * Facilitation or mediation of peace talks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Humanitarian assistance. * Monitoring and controlling illegal export of commodities from the affected country. * Advance planning for post-conflict economic rehabilitation and recovery.

Management of post-conflict transition

	<i>Military</i>	<i>Political</i>	<i>Economic</i>
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Rehabilitation and reintegration of former combatants. * Local control of small arms supplies. * Humanitarian mine action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Reconciliation between formerly hostile communities. * Rebuilding of judicial institutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Rehabilitation of essential services.
Civil society/ private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Assistance to veterans' associations to become articulate and responsible members of civil society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Promotion of democracy, human rights etc., including active participation in rebuilding institutions. * Promotion of reconciliation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Support to social service provision, income-generating projects, micro-credit etc. * Engagement in policy debate and monitoring of post-conflict rehabilitation programmes.
National political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Creation of a national army and security forces committed to democratic sovereignty. * Establishment of a comprehensive nationwide programme for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants and security officers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Establishment of democratic procedures and institutions. * Civilianisation of national political life. * Rebuilding national institutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Development of plans for rehabilitation of war-stricken areas, return and resettlement of refugees and IDPs, economic reintegration of demobilised former combatants, and relaunching the economy. * Development of new financing schemes for rehabilitation.
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Provision of peace-keeping forces as appropriate. * Monitoring adherence to military protocols in peace agreements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Supporting and monitoring implementation of peace agreements. * Promotion of regional civil society initiatives and networks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Assistance for refugees to return. * Promotion of regional integration, cross-border trade and other measures.
International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Provision of peace-keeping forces as appropriate. * Monitoring adherence to military protocols in peace agreements. * Support (financial and technical) to military reform and demobilisation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Institutional support to key ministries, departments for reconstruction. * Engagement in policy dialogue to promote democratisation and reconciliation plans over a realistic time frame * Support to civil society initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Sequenced economic assistance to support transition from conflict through rehabilitation to growth/development. * Providing conditionality-free assistance to rehabilitation and recovery plans through trust funds and similar initiatives. * Accelerated debt relief.

Conclusion

Developing a robust framework for regional peace and security in Africa is a major challenge. Many of the basic preconditions for establishing security communities have not been met. Africa can neither emulate the European experience nor reconstruct the south-east Asian experiment. However, an African path towards common security can be developed that reflects the unique problems, challenges and opportunities in Africa. More than anything else, this entails linking regional peace and security to internal conflict resolution and governance in African states, utilising the existing architecture of regional and subregional organisations as a key component.

The Constitutive Act of the African Union is silent on mechanisms for regional peace and security. For certain, the drafters of the Act did not envisage dismantling existing OAU capacities in this area including the Conflict Management Centre and the Central Organ. Peace and security are among the aims of the AU, and are mentioned as within the mandate of the Executive Council. But no details are spelled out. In the light of the absence of AU provision for a 'security council' and supportive mechanisms and institutions, the role of the AU, alongside CSSDCA, NEPAD and the subregional organisations, remains to be defined. It is imperative that both doctrine and institutions are established rapidly.

Any comprehensive strategy for peace and security is based on the precept that national security is far too important to be left to the military. Countries need to identify their strategy national security interests in a way that involves all stakeholders. The model of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers for each country, developed by participatory processes, can also be applied to the promotion of comprehensive national security doctrines.

The challenge for Africa is confronting the call for 'thinking the unthinkable' and being creative in responding to these challenges. Other regions can provide lessons and parallels but Africa has to develop its own collective institutions through its own political will. The much-maligned slogan 'African solutions to African problems' does not mean that Africa is an island untouched by global forces, but is a call for African ownership and originality in these matters.

The following key issues will need to be addressed:

1. How will the AU be linked to existing peace and security systems?
2. What role is envisaged for the CSSDCA as a conflict management mechanism within the framework of the AU?
3. Existing peace and security activities are also undertaken at the subregional level: given that there is no single comprehensive peace and security system, will the AU bring coherence to these subsystems? Or will ad hoc management remain the order of the day? Are transitional arrangements envisaged to harmonize initiatives until a new comprehensive peace and security doctrine emerges?
4. What peacekeeping and peace enforcement mechanisms and doctrines will be developed, based on the African experience and linked to international responsibilities? What doctrines for approving and implementing humanitarian intervention are envisaged, and how will mechanisms for mandating this be established in coordination with subregional organizations and the UN?
5. How will the regional peace and security agenda be linked to the UN Security Council and other international initiatives?