Prevention and Militarization in Africa's Security Governance

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Due to a conflict within policy circles between those who want more inclusive approaches to resolving conflict in Africa and those who want robust responses to violent jihadism, a problematic imbalance in African security governance is being created.

Introduction

African peace and security policy-makers and intellectuals within and beyond the continent are calling for more inclusive political approaches to resolving conflict in Africa. Yet, patterns of decision-making, most evidently by the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council, indicate that proactive, robust and joint responses to jihadist terrorism and radicalized armed non state actors are preferred because these threats pose particularly urgent challenges to Africa's security and political order. This argument has important transnational echoes and an imbalance in African security governance is being created as a result of these developments. The more implementation of the African peace and security architecture (APSA) is measured by how well the AU together with global partners fight global terrorism, the more likely an excessive over-reliance on military responses to political problems seems. Such over-reliance risks militarizing the people, ideas and institutions of Africa's security governance. Many voices in AU peace and security circles are pulling in a de-militarizing direction and are attempting to mobilize behind an enhanced prevention and mediation-agenda, and a value-driven vision of African ownership.

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Preventing armed conflicts is a strategic priority for the African Union Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) as seen in APSA Roadmap 2016-2020. This follows on from the Windhoek Declaration and AU-adopted commitment to end all wars and 'Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020' which forms part of the continent-wide Agenda 2063. The Agenda 2063 document, adopted by the AU Assembly of African Heads of state and government in May 2013, sets forth a value-based vision of a united and prosperous Africa. Understood as one leg of the pan-African political body, the APSA should arguably first and foremost facilitate Africa's unity, development and prosperity through early conflict prevention.

The Roadmap sets out the objective for the AU and the Regional Economic Communities (REC) and Regional Mechanisms (RM) to contribute to the prevention of conflicts and crises. Early warning systems with state of the art data collection and monitoring tools exist at continental and regional levels. Enhancing capacity means that they must coordinate and collaborate better with each other and other relevant component parts of APSA. The sometimes sensitive information that these early warning bodies gather is only as good as the use decision-makers and the AUPSC make of it.

The use of special envoys, senior mediation panels and networks of elders is one of the AU's 'best kept secrets'. To underscore their importance, the APSA Roadmap sets out as one objective to show evidence of frequency, relevance and efficacy of preventive diplomatic missions undertaken by the AU and the RECs. On a case by case basis, it has always been possible to gather knowledge about the roles and outcomes of preventive mediation efforts. Only a select few can claim to have the overall picture of their scales, roles and achievements. Most often mediation missions are set up rapidly and with an ad

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hoc initial role. At times, the AU Panel of the Wise is used, yet in other conflicts a high-level panel is tailored to the specific conflict by comprising former heads of state with high moral standing in the eyes of the conflicting parties.

The Roadmap notes that early warning capacity and inclusive mediation-capacity must be connected with the strategic security priorities of decision-makers. Early warning systems cannot collect equally in-depth and actionable data on all forms of conflict in Africa. However, concerning the most geo-strategically sensitive conflicts their reports are not likely to be as welcome or as frequently used by decision-makers. Might intellectuals and policy experts help change the mindset of decision-makers if they could point to research and verified information showing that prevention at early stages of conflict is most sustainable and effective? There exist examples of early warning/information sharing mechanisms which bridge the ‘soft’ approach with ‘hard’ security issues. For instance, the ‘Nouakchott process’ aims to enhance security cooperation between intelligence and security-services of states in the Sahelo-Sahara region. However, the political oversight and support of this process must be ensured. Early warning data can otherwise of course be narrowly used towards the military approach of regional states.

The preventive mediation tool has been used extensively, especially in the most geo-strategically important conflicts. However, their tasks, roles and achievements are less well known outside APSA’s decision-making circle. Often, references are made to Africa’s rich tradition of culturally aware and dialogue-centered ‘Baobab tree’ meetings. But it remains hard to access best practices and the gold standard of AU’s recruitment, support, as well as linking its preventive mediation to other external mediation initiatives. Changing this should be a key priority, especially since high-level gatherings and summits on

Africa's peace and security argue that prevention is the most cost-effective and the most successful form of conflict management for Africa. References are often made to the vital importance of inclusivity in African mediation culture. Dialogue must occur with all conflict actors. Talking to terrorists and non-state radicalized actors is therefore not excluded. The Windhoek Declaration argues that reflection is needed on the direction of the counter-terrorism agenda in Africa and importantly forefronts the value of Africa's rich tradition of mediation. This offers a possible bridge between ethical-political arguments (advocates of the preventive pivot) and interest-based arguments (advocates of robust action on global terrorism).

Reflection is required on how to calibrate prevention as a core phase in traditional conflict resolution with emerging specialized notions such as preventing mass atrocities (in line with the Responsibility to Protect), preventing acts of terrorism, and perhaps also preventing electoral violence. Diverging prevention agendas under conditions of resource scarcity might otherwise compete and bring with them rivalling perspectives and bureaucratic silos on prevention. More strategic discussions are needed about conflict patterns and structural as well as direct causes of wars and security threats. The Windhoek Declaration discusses how state fragility when considered a structural cause of radicalization of youth indicates that efforts aimed at enhancing democratic governance, security sector reform and state-society relations will prevent radicalization more effectively than military efforts because these only focus on 'symptoms' of state fragility.

A preventive turn might also be detected in global policymaking. The UN Secretary-General has placed prevention of atrocity crimes and the roles of regional actors in achieving this as a core priority in his July 2015 report on the

Responsibility to Protect (R2P). The UN General Assembly and UN Security Council on 27 April this year endorsed as a framing concept 'sustaining peace' in the recognition of the finding by the advisory group of experts' review of the peacebuilding architecture that peacebuilding must be an inclusive endeavor, and necessitates holistic approaches and global commitment starting with preventive mediation efforts. At the 24 May UN Security Council meeting on UN cooperation with regional and sub-regional organisations, a number of state representatives actually referred to the concept of 'sustaining peace' and/or the crucial role of UN-regional partnerships as glimmers of hope at this time of heightened pressure on global institutions to respond to several extremely complex conflicts. Some argued that the current global security situation requires a new mind set, even a 'paradigm shift' in global affairs.

Militarized institutional narratives and practices

The joint fight against violent extremism featured primarily at the first ever Africa-based core group meeting of the Munich Security Conference in April this year. The framing of the discussion was that global terrorism in North Africa, East Africa and the Sahel needed urgent, robust and joint action. The readiness of Africa's own peace and security institutions to lead on terrorism and other sources of insecurity was emphasized. The dominant position was starkly defensive: a strong perception is that the sovereign's role as main provider of territorial order and security is under unacceptable assault by non-democratic forces. Given the importance attached to stable African governments, such a perceived assault justifies military responses short term. 'Combat', 'fight against', and 'counter' violent terrorism and extremism were the common terms used at this event, and further echoed in relevant AU PSC meeting

communiqués (for example on 29 Jan 2016), as well as at the 5th Tana Security Forum in April 2016.

Present were representatives of academic institutions and CSOs that objected to the dominant trope and the prioritization of heavy handedness. These actors preferred to talk about historical and structural causes of terrorism (such as weak state-society relations, demographic challenges and unemployment rates). Or, they raised the acute absence of knowledge surrounding radicalization and recruitment into extremist groupings. Additionally, it was argued that strengthening or stabilizing central government and its ruling capacity by itself would not change the structural causes of marginalization and exclusion in many African societies.

It might be argued based on the assumption that global terrorism requires a global fight that it is a lesser ill that hard approaches overshadow alternative political, developmental and humanitarian-based approaches. Certainly, part of the global push towards strategic partnerships with African regional actors is linked to seeing African states and institutions as playing specific useful roles in world order. France and the US have most candidly expressed that the AU and certain African states play very useful combat roles in active conflicts, and that partnerships are strategic in so far as they help all involved partners identify and secure their respective interests. Partnerships offer one way to strengthen a global hybrid coalition of counter-terrorism. This is the predominant trend, even as counter-strategies and counter- arguments exist and will hopefully take hold. Prevention and responding to terrorism-rationales are not mutually exclusive, but are better understood as mirror images. The trick for the foreseeable future is how to rebalance APSA, and develop legitimate and sustainable ways to prevent/respond to terrorism.

There is a serious danger that context-driven, root-cause based values embedded in AU foundational documents and the APSA are being pulled in a direction to serve short-sighted militaristic values. In the medium to long term this will favor autocratic modes of governance on the continent and already extends a level of international legitimacy to autocratic leaders (for example Chad's Idriss Déby, Djibouti's Ismail Omar Guelleh and Uganda's Yoweri Museveni). This will also infer the AU with legitimacy and capacity building packages chiefly on basis of counter-terrorism practices. Consequently, other APSA programmes rank lower on the global priority ladder unless they are coupled with the 'fight' on terrorism. Adding to the pressures on APSA policy mechanisms to demonstrate capacity is the argument by certain African leaders and external partners that the African Standby Force and its rapid reaction capability must become more efficient. This line of argument has increased incentives for states to favor state-to-state relations and hybrid regimes to enable rapid and more efficient forms of political and security cooperation.

African peace operations receive external recognition due to their militarized characteristics. Most AU peace operations are stabilization missions, using combat operations against specific aggressors (sometimes terrorist groups) in bounded conflict theatres. The troop contributing countries to the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) have been commended and supported by the international community for the willingness to combat Al-Shabab fighters. As noted by Yvonne Akpasom in a book on Africa-led peace operations while this combat readiness may be necessary, it is crucial for APSA and for host populations in conflict-affected states that these stabilization missions are always linked to a political objective. AU-led missions to date have demonstrated operational readiness, but have been insufficiently streamlined with political strategic-level

direction. In need of development are: realization of protection of civilians policies and guidelines, human resources to plan for, for example, policing components and human rights observers, reflection on security sector reform and law and order efforts.

Conclusion

For AU member states and APSA policy organs, the first strategic priority is really the achievement of full ownership over regional security governance. The counter-terrorism developments referred to do not aim to settle whether global terrorism poses the biggest security threat to Africa's societies and populations. What is at stake is Africa's political authority to define conflicts and threats on the continent. To achieve a bigger impact on global governance, the AU has to balance the different pressures on it to demonstrate authority and capacity to manage security threats in Africa.

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