

PROMOTING PEACE

THE AFRICAN UNION AT 50

This year Africa celebrates 50 years of collective action: first through the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and more recently the African Union (AU). This is also a critical juncture in African history: the post-colonial period is over and the African Renaissance is underway; economic growth has been steady for a decade; and the number of wars and coups d'état has declined. However, Africans still face many challenges, and this anniversary year is an opportune time to examine how the AU can enhance its contribution to sustainable peace.

The OAU was a vehicle for pan-African solidarity at a time of struggle for liberation. Its successor the AU is part of the international peacebuilding system, making a significant contribution to peace in Africa. So far, however, this has focused primarily on preventing and reacting to large-scale violence – what is sometimes known as “negative peace”.

The AU can do more to promote the conditions for “positive peace” – that is, sustainable peace and prosperity. This includes addressing some of the key issues facing Africans, such as disaffected youth, international terrorism, organised crime, and the risks accompanying transitional political systems, natural resource extraction and climate change. At the same time, it can provide leadership to protect Africa from ill-adapted external “solutions” and exploitation, which undermine peace.

AFRICA FROM A PEACE PERSPECTIVE

War and violent conflict

Anti-colonial wars in Africa ended with the withdrawal of Portugal in 1975. Modern Africa has known few interstate wars of significant magnitude: the most recent between Ethiopia and Eritrea was brought to a ceasefire in 2000. Warfare and violent conflict in modern Africa has tended to be either civil war or societal in nature – the unleashing of organised violence by different groups within society. There are also numerous examples of states implicated in the civil wars of others.

The incidence of major violence has decreased, after a spike around the end of the Cold War. Many countries that experienced civil war in the 1990s–2000s are now in a post-conflict rebuilding phase – for example, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The kind of mass societal violence and genocide that occurred in Rwanda and Burundi has not recurred since the

mid-1990s. Overall, and depending on who is counting and the criteria they use, the number of armed conflicts has declined from around 30 at the end of the Cold War to less than 15 today. One factor behind this is the increase in international activism by the United Nations, AU, regional economic and political groupings, as well as other parts of the international community, all of which have played

a role in peacekeeping, mediation and peacebuilding.

Many challenges remain. It takes many years and a sustained peacebuilding effort to build positive peace (see box below). Peace in post-conflict places is not necessarily secure, as shown by the recurrence of fighting in Mali and by continued tensions between Sudan and South Sudan. It has been difficult

POSITIVE PEACE

Negative peace is when people have stopped fighting but have not necessarily addressed their conflicts or differences. This is often because they lack the institutions or capacity to do so. Negative peace is thus often temporary.

Positive peace, on the other hand, is when people and societies are successfully dealing with the unavoidable differences and conflicts that are part and parcel of human coexistence, without violence. It is recognisable not just by the absence of violence, but by the presence of functional relationships between people and peoples, between people and the state, and between states. Positive peace is also distinguishable by the existence of dynamic institutions capable of mediating those relationships. Peacebuilding aims above all to strengthen these institutions, and this requires a sustained, long-term approach.



in some places to bring about even a negative peace – notably in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Somalia – and millions of Africans remain displaced and at risk of harm.

Meanwhile, large parts of Africa are governed in ways which entrench structural violence against and between people. Examples include Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. Clashes between ethnic groups take place frequently across the continent. The “Arab Spring” uprisings resulted partly from repressive, incompetent and unrepresentative governance, and some commentators predict that the Arab Spring phenomenon will be replicated further south.

The story of conflict and violence in Africa is well rehearsed, even as things continue to improve. However,

several African countries, especially in West Africa, and are undermining governance. A third factor concerns the environmental effects of climate change, which are expected to cause social, economic and political instability.

Governance

The 2013 Kenyan general election provides a good example of how politics is partly changing, in its complex combination of a new constitution, active electoral participation, political parties aligned with ethnicity, the fear of election-linked violence, and sophisticated election and election-monitoring systems. During the Cold War less than 10 African countries had democratic changes of government and none of these lasted. More than 20 national elections were held in 2012 alone. The frequency of coups d’état has halved. Even when such coups do occur now, they are quickly declared

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three relatively new factors are worth noting. First is the emergence of Islamist extremists, often linked to global networks such as Al-Qaeda. They exploit the genuine frustrations of young Muslims, turning small but significant numbers into jihadists and thus further undermining governance and the economy. Meanwhile, international criminal networks have infiltrated the political economies of

unacceptable by the AU and other international bodies, which take rapid action to restore a more legitimate government.

This indicates that there is progress towards positive peace, but challenges still exist. The Kenyan election was overwhelmingly peaceful, disputes were settled by the courts and a new president was inaugurated.

However, underlying tensions have not disappeared amid fears that the political system and culture are inadequate to cope with them. Elections are important, but on their own they do not make a democracy. The period of transition – when governance is neither autocracy nor democracy, but somewhere in between, sometimes known as “anocracy” – is often marked by instability, because it creates uncertainty. Anocracy will be a feature in much of Africa for years, and its effects will be exacerbated by tensions between “traditional” and “modern” systems of governance.

The rule of law is not the norm. Clientelism remains a dominant and resilient feature of the political economy. It undermines the ability of democratically elected governments to provide services fairly and helps to create an unfavourable environment for economic development. A number of long-term heads of state have remained in power for many years. Some of them – for instance in Equatorial Guinea, Sudan and Zimbabwe – remain in office partly because elections are not yet free. In other cases, like Cameroon and Burkina Faso, the system is free in principle but not yet free or functional enough in practice.

Some parts of Africa, especially in crowded cities or remote areas, are beyond the reach of either traditional or modern formal governance. Mislabelled “ungoverned spaces”, these areas are governed informally – sometimes by criminal gangs, militias, or other illicit or semi-illicit groups.

Whichever system of governance nominally prevails, large groups are marginalised or disenfranchised. Women’s political participation lags behind that of men. Young people’s exclusion from decision making is a source of great frustration and makes young men susceptible to manipulation to engage in violence. Minority ethnic groups often feel powerless to influence affairs and are sometimes purposely excluded. Civil society is becoming increasingly sophisticated and dynamic, yet taken as a whole it remains largely tied to community, communal and ethnic identity,

as well as clientelist governance. Therefore, it is not yet a strong enough counterweight to power.

Economy

Political and economic participation are closely aligned, so those marginalised from political power are often marginalised from economic opportunity too, compounding their sense of exclusion and grievance. Nevertheless, economic growth in Africa has recently been spectacular, boosted by increased natural resource revenues. Real income per capita has gone up by more than 30 percent and foreign direct investment has tripled in the past decade to US\$50 billion per year, roughly equivalent to the value of remittances and to the value of aid. Regional common markets continue to evolve. Share trading volumes are small by global standards, but the number of stock markets has increased from five in 1960 to almost 30 today. The consumer market is growing: for example, there are roughly three mobile phones for every four people.

Some of the main challenges from a peacebuilding perspective are sustaining this growth, broadening the sectors of economic activity, and increasing economic participation. Inequality is increasing along with gross domestic product (GDP) in many countries. Africa remains overwhelmingly rural and agricultural, characterised largely by smallholder farming and extensive livestock rearing. There is a tension between the short-term need for stability, maintained by the prevalence of peasant farming, and the need for agriculture to become more commercially oriented, which would entail a rationalisation of land ownership and resulting instability.

Economic growth is highly dependent on inherently unsustainable commodities. This fails to create or spread wealth unless value-added processing or production takes place in the country of origin, which is not happening enough. African countries continue to receive low business competitiveness scores in international indices. Many are also subject or susceptible to the “resource curse”, making them prone to instability.

Demography

Certain demographic trends are linked to the prospects for peace. Population growth is higher than in other regions. By some estimates, the population of Africa will double between now and 2050, putting pressure on resources – especially where climate variability makes agriculture unpredictable.

The urban middle class, who are often linked to stability and increased demand for democracy, is growing. Africa is also experiencing a “youth bulge” and the dependency ratio – the proportion of dependents per person of economically active age – is high. This is an obstacle to entrepreneurship and growth. It is expected that this will evolve and that sometime after 2025 the dependency ratio will be more conducive for economic growth – the so-called demographic dividend. Already many young people are providing leadership in the arts, civil society, business, etc., taking advantage of education, global connections and improved communications. Young

parts of the world. With their reliance on commodities and their relatively fragile governance, African countries are vulnerable to external trends and influences, whether positive or negative. The centre of economic gravity is shifting from the Atlantic towards the Pacific, indicating a new set of trading and political partners for Africans, especially China. Globalisation has undermined the power of the state internationally, and empowered licit and illicit international economic actors whose activities often undermine livelihoods and governance. International mining, oil and agribusiness companies help increase GDP but often reinforce clientelist governance.

External support for the overthrow of presidents Gaddafi and Gbagbo is a symptom of one kind of international activism. International peacekeeping has proven critical in helping to stop wars in several countries, but has also prevented the resolution of some conflicts. Moreover, it is partly

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people are actively claiming political, economic and social space, but there are limits to what they are allowed to achieve or to what is available.

Ever-increasing numbers of well-educated young people with high expectations of economic and social improvement are chasing too few jobs. This is a source of frustration and has been linked to conflict, e.g. the Arab Spring, instability in cities and the civil wars of West Africa. There is no obvious prospect of providing full employment to these cohorts in the near future. Where political systems are inadequate to contain and manage their frustration, instability may result. Urbanisation is growing and 50 percent of the population is expected to live in cities by 2030. This is linked to the creation of large “slum” areas, which lend themselves to gang violence and illicit governance.

External influences

Africa is increasingly connected economically and politically with other

counterbalanced by easy access to the international arms trade by governments and their opponents. Most of the International Criminal Court’s work so far has been in Africa. International aid provides important funding and expertise, but also distorts policy, exchange rates and governance. Global terrorists and criminal networks increase rates of violence and undermine governance, as do Western actions and policies against them. At the same time, liberal international trade norms impede African governments from nurturing their economies.

To conclude this brief survey, Africa is in some ways at a critical juncture, dealing with an enormous amount of change. This brings opportunity and frustration, both of which need good management to maximise the potential for progress and avoid instability. Many of the countries which emerged from the shadow of the colonial era have now arrived at a point where their people are better educated, have higher

expectations of the political economy, and are sufficiently linked into global communications to know what they might expect. Economic growth means most governments are less dependent on aid, but face rising inequality among people with increasingly democratic expectations. The number of active conflicts has decreased and, from a positive peace perspective, progress is being made. Yet significant challenges remain.

THE AU AND PEACE

The official theme for the OAU/AU 50th anniversary is “Pan-Africanism and Renaissance”, neatly symbolising the link between the OAU and AU. The OAU was born as many African nations were emerging from the shadow of colonialism, when pan-African identity represented an important rallying cry for people whose identities had been distorted by imperial rule, as well as providing an antidote to ethnic divisions. The AU meanwhile was born when the post-colonial era was coming to an end and when the Cold War was over – a propitious moment to recognise and celebrate the diversity and dynamism of new ideas, confidence, roles and capacities.

Peace and security are major priorities for the AU, and are highly subsidised by the donors whose support is crucial given the limited funds available from member states. The Department of Peace and Security is the largest department in the AU Commission (AUC). The AU’s founding documents reinforce the idea of positive peace. The AU’s vision is of an ‘integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena’. Its Constitutive Act clearly identifies democratic governance, the rule of law, equality and human rights as critical public goods to be promoted and safeguarded by the AU. The Responsibility to Protect doctrine is also implicitly included.

The AU has made important contributions to peace:

- It has led or co-led peacekeeping missions or similar interventions in



UN Secretary-General addresses AU, 2013 © UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Burundi, Comoros, DRC, Madagascar, Mauritania, Somalia and Sudan.

- It has brokered and mediated talks and agreements between Sudan and South Sudan, in Guinea, Kenya and Cote d'Ivoire.
- It has responded quickly to coups, calling for a swift return to constitutional rule, and also maintains an early warning watch across the continent.
- It has developed a series of charters, outlining norms in areas relevant to peace – including governance, gender equality, human rights and youth – although many of these charters still need to be ratified and domesticated by member states.

Alongside this progress, the AU faces three important and interrelated challenges.

Getting the balance right between crisis response and peacebuilding

Despite its mandate, the AU has been overwhelmingly reactive and crisis-oriented, more in line with the concept of negative peace than with building positive peace. This reflects the need and laudable desire among member states to prevent fighting and bring it to a speedy end when it occurs. It also reflects the interests of the wider international community, including donors, for “African solutions to African problems”.

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- The AU is spearheading work clarifying international borders in Africa.
- It has articulated a framework for post-conflict reconstruction and development.
- It is working with the UN and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to develop the African Peace and Security Framework, which includes an Africa Standby Force comprised of military and police units ready to respond in crises.
- The AU’s African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) plays an important role, promoting and monitoring progress towards good governance.

Many longer-term approaches to peacebuilding are highly political. The AU’s member states, represented by incumbent governments, understandably prefer not to have outsiders interfering in their internal affairs. Thus, some aspects of peacebuilding are seen as being off limits. For example, it is unlikely that a member state would be willing to accept outside interference in its mining or oil sector, even though it is well known that mining and oil often contribute to instability. The same is true in relation to other aspects of governance: for example, 40 percent of member states have not yet signed

up to the APRM, and of those that have, only half have been peer-reviewed.

Positive peace implies a need to rebalance the AU's peace efforts away from crisis anticipation and response, towards a longer-term, more societal orientation which promotes better quality of and more equal access to decision making, the economy, justice and security. This would allow the AU to do more to address some of the obstacles to peace identified earlier in this paper.

Finding the right niche

Another challenge is linked to the AU's niche within the international system. The AU – a relatively resource-poor institution – is part of a complex international governance system along with the UN, RECs and states, each with more or less clearly defined normative roles. In an imperfect rather than a normative world, this is complicated – for example, by unequal influence among member states, by the relatively undemocratic nature of some member states, by unequal capacity among different RECs, and by the

influence of external powers like the European Union, United States and China, whose preferences inevitably have an influence on those of the AU, including their desire to reduce external military involvement in peacekeeping operations in Africa.

It is also complicated by differences in peacekeeping doctrine between the AU and UN. At times, the AU seems to be replicating or replacing both the UN and RECs, when it could be playing a more complementary role. Differences between the positions of member states – as well as tensions between the AU and RECs, the UN and Western powers – have complicated its approach to crises in Cote d'Ivoire, Libya and Somalia. It is also worth noting that no other regional intergovernmental organisation tries to promote peace and security on such a scale as the AU, with 54 relatively underdeveloped member states. Therefore, its task is inherently challenging.

Linking up with African civil society

The APRM's executive director recently bemoaned the fact that the APRM is 'unknown to the majority

of [African] peoples and the rest of the world', and this is true of the AU more generally. This disempowers people who have little idea what their governments have agreed to on their behalf. This is ironic, given the 50th anniversary focus on pan-Africanism.

There are numerous obstacles to African civil society engagement with the AU. Few Africans are able to visit the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa; African civil society and the AUC both lack resources to improve their mutual engagement easily; and it is not always in the interest of member state governments to promote the AU's priorities, such as democracy and good governance, at home. Although the AU has liaison offices in around a dozen countries, these lack the resources to represent the ideas and mission of the AU in its entirety. The voice of each member state in the AU is primarily the voice of its incumbent government – which tends to exclude important perspectives and groups in society. Women's voices are particularly ill-represented, and the AUC has relatively few staff with expertise in gender issues.

CONCLUSIONS

The AU has already shown that it makes a significant contribution to peace. The ideas presented in this paper are designed to stimulate discussion in the AU's institutions, in member state governments and in civil society about how it could do more – for example by:

- **Getting the focus right:** The AU is most effective when focused on the right issues and the right niche. In operating politically and in close collaboration with the UN and RECs, the AU is well placed to mediate, provide political and analytical support to others, and promote common peacebuilding frameworks. Implementing complex peacekeeping missions which stretch its operational capacity is arguably a distraction from this.
- **Emphasising a long-term peacebuilding approach:** The AU is well placed to help member states put in place the norms, institutions and other conditions for positive peace, including conflict-sensitive trade and free movement across borders. It can also help Africans work out how to meet the challenges of anocracy, for instance by adapting and implementing the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States.
- **Strengthening links with civil society:** The AU could improve collaboration with civil society, for example in promoting good governance, by using creative methods, such as allying itself with NGOs and using social media to publicise its various charters. The AU could also communicate more through its liaison offices and through the good offices of member states.
- **Anticipating new threats to peace:** The AU can take a lead in helping member states and RECs to work out how to respond to common and/or emerging threats to peace – such as disaffected youth, international terrorism, criminality, and the risks associated with anocracy, natural resource exploitation and climate change. All of these need to be addressed at least partly at a supranational level.
- **Providing African leadership:** African states, citizens and businesses will benefit from further visionary political leadership at a continental level to help protect against external influences likely to undermine positive peace, and to seize opportunities for progress. This will require African solutions, as well as joint solutions with external agencies and powers – such as on Islamist terrorism and the illegal drug trade.

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