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Imbalances in the African Peace and Security Architecture

The Current Approach to Capacity-building Needs to Be Challenged

Judith Vorrath

Given the current crisis in Mali and the renewed rebellion in Eastern Congo, the debate over “finding African solutions to African problems” has emerged with new vehemence. Ten years after the creation of the African Union (AU), the establishment of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) on the continent has progressed. But its outcomes have not met the ambitions of both African and external actors. The most commonly cited reason for this is a lack of capacity. However, the AU’s experiences have revealed that more fundamental imbalances characterize the APSA, calling for a targeted response from international donors.

At the latest AU summit in Addis Ababa in July 2012, the outgoing AU-Commission President Jean Ping stated that “the solutions to African problems are found on the continent and nowhere else”. The Peace and Security Architecture – anchored in the AU and spearheaded by its Peace and Security Council (PSC) since 2004 – stands as the central building block of this approach. The AU now officially builds on the concept of human security and has adopted the principle of “non-indifference”, breaking away from the previous dominance of the principle of non-intervention on the continent.

However, the effectiveness and scope of AU peace endeavours have remained limited in light of this normative claim, which is commonly attributed to the AU’s lack of capacity.

The Capacity-building Mantra

Since its foundation, the AU has clearly broadened the scope of its operations. In addition to diplomatic initiatives and mediation attempts, the AU frequently sanctions unconstitutional changes of government, and leads its own peace support operations. Besides the PSC and the AU Commission’s Department of Peace and Security, APSA has other institutional components – most notably the African Standby Force, the Continental Early Warning System and two advisory bodies. However, so far, these components are only partly functional. Furthermore, the organization is not at all in a position to bear its operative expenses. In fact, between 2008 and 2011, African states provided only two per cent of the AU’s Peace Fund to cover various

activities in the field of peace and security. The remaining 98 per cent were contributed by international donors. The current AU mission in Somalia (AMISOM), in particular, lacks the necessary means and to a significant extent depends on resources provided by the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN).

In order to reduce this excessive reliance on external actors and to allow for a real “Africanisation” of security, attempts to build up or strengthen AU capacities have taken hold. However, to what extent African actors have effective ownership of the agenda still remains questionable. Moreover, only limited portions of the contributions by the most important donors to the APSA are actually allocated to capacity-building. So far, the EU’s African Peace Facility has provided 100 million euro for capacity-building – mostly towards the operationalisation of the APSA – while 600 million euro have been allocated to African peace support missions – mostly to cover operational costs, transportation, housing, fuel, and communication. In addition, the line between developing the AU’s own capacities and providing capacities from the outside, mostly through the UN, is an extremely blurred one.

But more significantly, ongoing efforts have been jeopardized by imbalances within the APSA itself. These, on the one hand, consist of the uneven advance of regional integration below the AU, and, on the other hand, the fact that peacebuilding has been strongly emphasized in declarations and discourse while being mostly neglected in actual AU peace missions. These imbalances will not simply disappear with the further operationalisation of the APSA.

Subsidiary Mismatch

The Architecture assigns a leading role in conflict prevention and resolution to regional economic communities (REC) and regional mechanisms below the AU as well as to member states. Accordingly, important APSA components like the

Continental Early Warning System and the African Standby Force with its five regional brigades rely on institutional pillars in the different regions of the continent. Yet, the degree of regional integration below the AU varies widely. Western and Southern Africa for example both have relatively strong RECs with established security mechanisms. Northern and Eastern Africa, in contrast, lack such adequate structures for the establishment of the respective regional brigade. Hence, ad hoc regional mechanisms had to be set up there.

This imbalance indicates that in several regions, a political framework for effective peace endeavours is largely absent. Yet, the AU relies on regional organizations far beyond the provision of troops and security mechanisms. In response to the recent crisis in Mali, the AU Peace and Security Council in July 2012 authorized the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to take all necessary measures to guarantee the security of Mali’s transitional government, reorganize the security forces, restore the Malian State’s authority over the northern part of the country, and combat terrorist and criminal networks. In this way, the key aspects of conflict management and resolution were delegated to a regional economic community.

The difficulty for the AU to act as a “peacemaker” without a functional regional pillar has been demonstrated during the Libyan crisis. Since the Arab Maghreb Union, as the North African regional organization officially linked to the AU, has been ineffective, the Arab League became the key (cross-) regional player. In March 2011, the Arab League announced support for a foreign intervention on the basis of a UN resolution. Thereby, it thwarted the AU’s efforts to find a political solution within the framework of the PSC-initiated Roadmap.

The consequences of weak regional structures are even more obvious in the case of Central and Eastern Africa. There are several overlapping organizations in this region, and yet few effective peace

efforts are being undertaken. In two major conflict zones, namely Somalia and the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), neighbouring countries have repeatedly intervened militarily, bypassing the existing missions of the AU and the UN respectively. These interventions have only been partly approved by local governments. Furthermore, interventions are being undertaken indirectly, as in the case of the currently operating armed group M23 in Eastern DRC that according to a UN report is supported by Rwanda. The DRC issue is being addressed by the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, which is not an official pillar of APSA, although the AU initiated it in 2004. The prospect that the Conference will effectively implement its July 2012 decision to dispatch “neutral international troops” in Eastern Congo is doubtful, as the composition of forces from the Great Lakes region remains highly contentious.

These cases illustrate the wider problems of weak regional (economic) organizations in an environment of extensive regional conflict formations. It is worth noting that some of the neighbouring states occasionally intervening on their own terms belong to APSA’s major contributors – be it in terms of troops (Rwanda, Uganda) or financial means (Ethiopia, Kenya). Hence they do not actually exemplify the commonly cited lack of commitment to making contributions at the AU level. This is not necessarily a contradiction, as the support for “African solutions” might be a way for these states to secure their access to foreign aid and avoid international criticism over other issues such as human rights protection. Yet, this behavior does certainly not promote effective “regional multilateralism” in their direct neighbourhood. Due to APSA’s subsidiary set-up, this mismatch will continue to constrain its effectiveness, even if the AU manages to better fulfill its role as the operational centre for African peace efforts in the foreseeable future.

Multidimensional on Paper, One-dimensional in Reality

With the new multidimensional security approach laid out in the 2004 Common African Defense and Security Policy, the AU is breaking new ground. The peacebuilding concept is a core element of this approach. According to Article 14 of the AU Peace and Security Protocol, it entails restoring the rule of law, establishing and developing democratic institutions, and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs.

Therefore, the African Standby Force, particularly with its civilian components, is also responsible for tasks relating to human rights, good governance and post-conflict reconstruction. However, in most regional structures, the civilian components are still subordinated to the military ones. This also applies to previous AU-led peace missions. These missions’ mandates contained significant elements of (civilian) peacebuilding, as they are listed in the PSC Protocol. Yet, peace support operations have mostly engaged in short-term stabilization before handing over to multidimensional UN missions as in Burundi (ONUB, later Integrated UN Office/BINUB), or to a hybrid mission such as in Sudan/Darfur (UNAMID).

This situation does not arise solely from a lack of capacity. Rather, it is due to the fact that although the peacebuilding concept of the AU is clearly based on the liberal peace model, the realization of its core components – particularly a stable democratic system and the respect for human rights – has remained limited in many member states. While unconstitutional changes of government are frequently disapproved by the PSC today, governments that seized power through force earlier on and retain it by dubious means can be quite sure to avoid sanctions. In fact, some of these states – such as Ethiopia between 2004 and 2010, and currently Zimbabwe – are or have been members of the PSC even though they did not fulfill the requirements provided by the Council’s statutes in terms of respect for the rule of law as well as for constitutional and human rights.

Regardless of whether the peace model used is suitable or not, the empowerment of (civilian) peacebuilding in the AU will remain difficult, while a continued focus on short term stabilization through mostly military means seems a likely prospect.

Conclusion

Despite the inherent imbalances, strengthening APSA's structures is not obsolete. Furthermore, international donors will continue to engage in capacity-building initiatives anyway. However, the current approach needs to be questioned and the debate extended beyond the classical issues of "ownership" and "sustainability". So far, the EU and the German federal government's efforts have been mostly focusing on the AU level, for example the Department of Peace and Security. But the structural imbalances undermining APSA also need to be addressed and reduced. When supporting regional organizations and mechanisms below the AU, donors like the German government must make sure that a more balanced subsidiary network is promoted. Otherwise, single organizations are supported separately without a coherent concept. That way several organizations with overlapping memberships and mandates in the same region receive international assistance, while in other regions few regional structures are built up. Furthermore, the political will of African States to support APSA should not only be assessed in terms of the provision of troops for peace missions or financial contributions. International donors must give greater consideration to the states' political role in their own regions and in civilian peacebuilding.

Lastly, the political dialogue must be intensified. If the appropriate political foundation is lacking, measures undertaken towards the operationalisation of APSA's components will only have limited effect. Moreover, the setup of single instruments – such as the African Standby Force – in a mostly technocratic manner without the adequate political structures can be

risky. It must be ensured that an extension of capacities really benefits APSA, particularly regarding the military structures which are still to be provided by AU member states. Frameworks for a political dialogue on these issues do exist, for example as part of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy. The German federal government should make sure that issues of peace and security are not discussed detached from aspects of human rights and democratic governance in such forums.

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