



Peace & Security Council Report

PSC postpones several activities due to COVID-19

Stand-off following presidential elections in Guinea-Bissau

Patching up South Sudan's broken political space

Africa's role in the scramble for the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden

Why has the AU been silent on the Ethiopian dam dispute?

South Africa's priorities for 2020 – Interview with South Africa's ambassador to the AU

PSC postpones several activities due to COVID-19

In line with recommendations to halt the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in Africa, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) has suspended its meetings at the African Union (AU) headquarters until further notice. It has also postponed the induction of 10 new members elected at the 32nd AU Summit last February and due to assume membership on 1 April 2020. A meeting meant to take stock of the AU Master Roadmap on Silencing the Guns was also postponed.

This is in line with Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention's (Africa CDC) recommendations to postpone most if not all in-person meetings and rather opt for virtual (audio or video) conferences. The Africa CDC issued those directives to the PSC on 11 March 2020.

The AU Commission, where the Africa CDC is currently based, also took measures to protect its staff in line with the Africa CDC's advice to reduce social contact to minimise contamination. Measures decided on 17 March 2020 included working from home for non-essential staff and a system of rotational office hours for the rest. A meeting between the current chair of the AU, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, and AU commissioners to discuss the organisation's 2020 programme of work was also postponed.

The PSC must adapt its working methods to this new reality, like many other organisations globally

Current PSC Chairperson

His Excellency Crisantos Obama Ondo, ambassador of Equatorial Guinea to Ethiopia and permanent representative to the African Union.

PSC members

Angola, Djibouti, Algeria, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Kenya, Liberia, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Togo, Lesotho, Zimbabwe

The PSC will, however, meet – probably using video conferencing – in cases of emergency. This means that the PSC must adapt its working methods to this new reality, like many other organisations globally. This applies to the AU as whole but will raise questions for the PSC in particular in terms of obtaining a quorum, reaching consensus to make decisions, and taking coordinated action in response to Africa's pressing peace and security challenges.

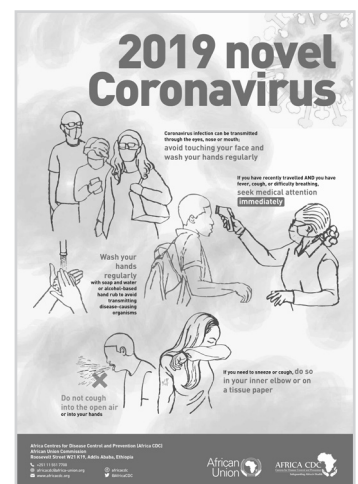
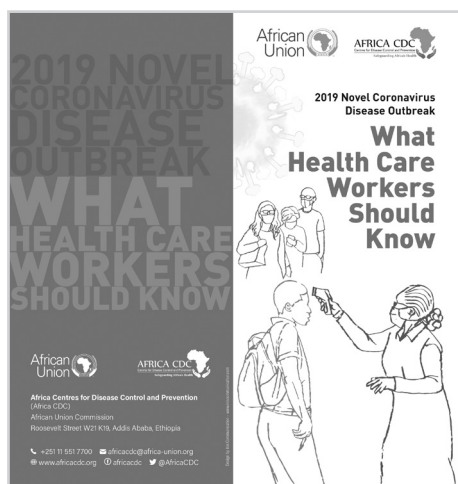
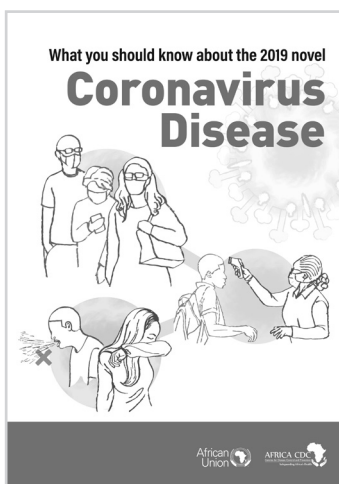
Africa has seen a sharp rise in the number of cases that has tested positive for COVID-19 since early March. On Friday 20 March 1 700 people on the continent had tested positive for the virus. Many African governments are taking measures to contain its spread, ranging from semi or total restrictions on internal movement to international travel restrictions and bans from and to certain countries, on top of the increasing number of hygiene precautions people are urged to take on a daily basis.

The Africa CDC, with the World Health Organization (WHO), is supporting African countries individually while coordinating the response at continental level through, for instance, streamlining the distribution of medical equipment. The Africa CDC is providing daily updates on the spread of the pandemic through Africa and collating COVID-19 hotline numbers in African countries.

Spontaneous initiatives have also emerged, such as donations of medical supplies by the Jack Ma Foundation to assist African countries (and others). The material for each African country (20 000 test kits, 100 000 masks and 1 000 medical use protective suits and face shields) was sent to Ethiopia on 22 March. The government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has agreed to use the Ethiopian Airlines cargo network to distribute this to other African countries. AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat thanked the Jack Ma Foundation for this donation to 43 countries and said the Africa CDC had been training teams in these countries in laboratory diagnostics since February.

The Africa CDC is supporting African countries individually while coordinating the response at continental level

Meanwhile, COVID-19 is further exposing gaps in the governance of several African countries, notably when it comes to the provision of basic services such as healthcare, water and sanitation, and their potential to make this pandemic more difficult to stem than it could have been with proper systems in place.



COVID-19 RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE AT WWW.AFRICACDC.ORG

Stand-off following presidential elections in Guinea-Bissau

More than two months after the second round of the presidential elections held on 29 December 2019, Guinea-Bissau is sinking into a post-electoral deadlock fraught with unforeseeable consequences.

This new post-election crisis in Guinea-Bissau exposes the lack of interest that certain national players have in the country's stability, the incoherence and lack of coordination of the international community, and the need to reconsider the stabilisation process.

Umaro Sissoco Embaló, declared the winner of the elections by the National Electoral Commission (CNE), has organised his own inauguration, while the Supreme Court has still not passed a definitive judgement on the appeal lodged by former prime minister Domingos Simoes Pereira. Embaló took office and installed a new government led by Nuno Gomes Nabiam, after having dismissed that of Prime Minister Aristides Gomes. Embaló is supported by his predecessor, former president José Mario Vaz, and by the military hierarchy.

The lack of good will and the failure of political and institutional stakeholders in Guinea-Bissau to look beyond their own short-term interests, as well as the muted reaction by international actors involved in stabilising the country, have opened the door to military interference. The return of certain figures from the army to the political game is a threat to the stability of the country and the region and calls for better-coordinated action by the international community.

Difficult reconciliation

The antagonism between the key players in the post-election crisis is so profound that it is necessary at this stage to coordinate mediation efforts. The post-election crisis currently sweeping through Guinea-Bissau is an extension of the August 2015 crisis, triggered by the sacking of Pereira as prime minister by then president Vaz. Pereira is also president of the powerful African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) and thus the crisis revolves around control of the PAIGC and political power in Guinea-Bissau.

In the end, Pereira has kept the upper hand and the dissident group – supporters of Vaz – were expelled

from the PAIGC. They then created the Movement for Democratic Change – G15 (MADEM-G15) in 2018.

The mediation efforts led by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), resulting in the Conakry Agreement of 14 October 2016, failed to ease tensions between these two factions.

The return of certain figures from the army to the political game is a threat to the stability of the country

The resulting institutional paralysis has led international stakeholders to favour elections as a solution to the crisis. This is to the detriment of national dialogue and the implementation of priority reforms (revision of the Constitution and electoral laws) before the elections.

At the end of the legislative elections of March 2019, tensions were exacerbated, particularly around the nomination of the office-bearers of the National People's Assembly. Embaló became the candidate of the MADEM and opposed Pereira in the December 2019 elections.

It is in this context of profound antagonism that the presidential elections were held. These elections were thus held at a time when the future of the leaders of the PAIGC and MADEM, as well as their support among the army and civil society, was at stake, so foreshadowing the situation the country finds itself in today.

The ambivalence of ECOWAS member states

Since the coup d'état in April 2012, ECOWAS has been the key player in the stabilisation process in Guinea-Bissau. It almost single-handedly succeeded in putting in place a political transition and, as part of that effort, sent a diplomatic and military mission tasked with ensuring the security of institutions and supporting the country in the reform of the defence and security sector.

After the start of the crisis in 2015, ECOWAS also initiated mediation proceedings that resulted in the signing of the Conakry Agreement.

Yet, the organisation's lack of coherence in managing the post-election crisis and the absence of coordination with international stakeholders involved have weakened its position.

Indeed, by 'acknowledging the definitive results of the second round' and congratulating Embaló in its 22 January statement, even though the electoral dispute had not yet been clarified by the Supreme Court, ECOWAS seemed to be pressuring the Supreme Court.

This not only weakened the country's highest jurisdiction, which also serves as the Constitutional Court, but also made the management of the electoral dispute more difficult. The controversy that followed regarding the role of the court and the CNE in electoral processes has not allowed these two bodies to accomplish their mission without interference.

ECOWAS's contradictory positions in managing the electoral dispute – an ongoing process – also revealed the profound divisions within the regional organisation, where the agenda of certain states seems to be prioritised above the regional agenda.

While the commission considers the investiture of Embaló as taking place 'beyond legal and constitutional frameworks', his presidency has been recognised by Senegal, Nigeria and Niger. This situation created unease within both ECOWAS and the international community, which refuses to endorse this 'power grab' that seems to bring certain military players back into power, i.e. those who are under United Nations sanctions and suspected of being implicated in drug trafficking.

Army at the centre of the political game

The army has often played a determining political role in Guinea-Bissau. It is responsible for several coups, the last one being in April 2012. Since then it has not interfered in the country's politics. The Chief of Staff of the armed forces, Biagui Nantam, appointed in 2014, repeatedly stated that soldiers would henceforth remain 'outside of political quarrels'. However the current position of the military hierarchy regarding

Embaló undermines this neutrality and suggests there is an attempt by some factions of the army to influence politics.

The return to politics of certain military figures with controversial reputations is a major risk to the long-term stability of both Guinea-Bissau and the region. It not only threatens the civil–military balance, vital for the proper functioning of institutions, but could also enable military figures suspected of involvement in drug trafficking to control state apparatus.

Grab this opportunity

This crisis needs to be analysed against the backdrop of the recurrent political upheaval in Guinea-Bissau. The conflicts between the main political stakeholders, their civilian supporters and the army are a major contributor to the country's instability. Because of the attitude of the political and military classes, a large part of the population is paying the price for these repeated crises.

Since the coup d'état in April 2012, ECOWAS has been the key player in the stabilisation process in Guinea-Bissau

The continuation of the crisis and the state paralysis since 2015 have allowed the military to enter the political stage. The impact of this should not be underestimated. It is necessary to send a firm message to the country's political and military figures and highlight as clearly as possible their responsibility in the worsening of the crisis. It is also important to avoid giving the impression that the situation could improve without constructive national dialogue.

In addition, it is essential to return to constitutional order. To do this, an expanded high-level AU mission should go to Guinea-Bissau as soon as possible to try to create conditions that will normalise the situation, which could have unpredictable consequences given the profile of the figures involved and their personal interests. It is in the interest of the regional and international community to harmonise their positions to prevent Guinea-Bissau from becoming another hotbed of violence in an already unstable region.

Patching up South Sudan's broken political space

The formation of South Sudan's new unity government on 22 February 2020 is a major milestone in recent efforts to restore peace in that country. This is the first successful attempt to form an inclusive government since 2016.

The period in the run-up to the 22 February deadline saw heightened diplomatic efforts by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and South Africa's Deputy President David Mabuza. The swearing-in of opposition leader Riek Machar and four other vice presidents was thus a relief not only to the people of South Sudan but also to the many regional and international actors involved in the search for peace in the country.

Yet the diplomatic pressure needed to secure the last-minute deal has left many wondering whether the actors will be committed to the outcome of the process, whether the way ahead for the new unity arrangement will be any different from the failed attempt in 2016, and whether it will be able to bring about lasting peace in South Sudan.

Cause for hope

Despite the fragile nature of the unity government, there are a number of major improvements on the previous one that give rise to cautious optimism. Apart from the fact that the June 2018 ceasefire increasingly seems to be holding, the compromises the parties made in the run-up to February 22 are key.

Under intense pressure, President Salva Kiir reversed his controversial decree to create 32 states in South Sudan and accepted a return to the pre-war 10 states. Although he named Ruweng as a new administrative area, which some feared could jeopardise the agreement, many consider the move a bold show of goodwill amid the various interests and sensitivities that developed around the creation of the 32 states.

Machar also backed down on his earlier insistence on having his own private security on his return to Juba and accepted government protection. This was significant given previous attempts on Machar's life. In 2016 he had to flee on foot from Juba to the

Democratic Republic of Congo after being pursued by government forces.

Many believe that the weight of these compromises suggests some level of commitment to the process.

A damaging stalemate

The second reason for cautious optimism is the negative effects the lack of progress in restoring peace had.

Even though Kiir's government has had the upper hand on the battlefield against the various opposition forces, it failed to maintain a healthy relationship with key international actors and to sustain the international goodwill the country had at independence.

The Kiir government's lack of political will and poor human rights record had a negative impact and towards the end of the pre-transitional period the government increasingly slipped into an antagonistic relationship with major powers.

Regionally, the lack of progress also contributed to a 'wait and see' attitude by some countries, including Kenya, which became notably absent from regional diplomatic efforts regarding South Sudan.

Many believe that the weight of these compromises suggests some level of commitment to the process

Meanwhile, Machar's opposition group has also been on the back foot since the collapse of the 2015 peace agreement, and lacked the capacity to match the government's military strength.

In addition, the proliferation of armed groups and the emergence of leaders such as Thomas Cirillo

and Paul Malong to contest Machar's dominance of the opposition political space diluted the Sudan People's Liberation Movement–In Opposition's (SPLM-IO) position as the go-to party for those who opposed Kiir.

Both the government and the main opposition (SPLM-IO) were locked in a stalemate that would have been difficult for either to sustain in the long run.

The formation of the current unity government has thus been in the interest of both leaders, as it gives them new relevance. Many believe that this could motivate Kiir and Machar to work together in the interest of peace, rather than against each other.

Return to the status quo

Despite the optimism in some circles, however, there is still deep mistrust between Kiir and Machar.

Machar still intends to contest Kiir for the presidency, and there is no clear indication whether Kiir will be receptive to such an idea. The antagonism between the two leaders over this issue helped to trigger the crisis in 2013.

The opposition could again fracture if the expectations of the various interest groups are not met

Bringing the two into the unity government without any significant changes to the underlying contestation between them effectively restores the status quo. The formation of the current unity government can, thus, at best, be described as patching up South Sudan's broken political space. This is necessary to silence the guns in the interim, but offers no lasting solution to the underlying drivers of instability in the country.

It is therefore an arrangement that assumes that the two rivals will look beyond their differences to find a working formula for dealing with the crisis. Despite increasing the number of vice presidents, there is no indication that the current configuration will generate any new ideas.

It is imperative that facilitators of the peace process continue to build confidence among members of the rather large presidency.

The current configuration has effectively returned South Sudan to its pre-war political context. It raises questions as to whether the country will be able to construct a new political space that revolves around the state rather than personalities.

The dangers ahead

One of the risks to the new government is that the opposition could again fracture if the expectations of the various interest groups are not met.

The existence of some armed groups outside the current process and outstanding issues in terms of the security arrangements are also crucial matters that will determine the success or otherwise of the unity government. Any defecting faction is likely to join the groups currently outside the unity government.

In a country with a history of political fracturing and transactional politics, managing existing interests, contestations over emerging interests and outstanding issues is a delicate balancing act. Currently, any further splintering of the armed groups will significantly offset gains made in forming the unity government and derail the process.

The role of external support

One of the major lessons from the current process in South Sudan is that concerted regional and international efforts in support of willing domestic initiatives can make a major difference in the search for peace. The regional consensus that informed the final push to end the pre-transition phase and the pressure that came with it should continue in order to sustain the unity government.

Going forward, development partners should support the unity government so that citizens can reap the dividends of peace. It is also imperative that partners adopt a common voice in their messaging for maximum impact.

The African Union Peace and Security Council needs to commend the parties for making the necessary last-minute concessions to establish the unity government. The council should also decisively reiterate its rejection of spoilers and its readiness to sanction any policy or action by individuals, entities and groups meant to sabotage peace in South Sudan.

Africa's role in the scramble for the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden

The first ministerial-level meeting of the PSC on the Horn of Africa and Red Sea region, planned for February 2020, was cancelled for undisclosed reasons. The meeting was expected to define Africa's priorities and interests in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden region, and chart the way forward for its engagement.

The AU is the only regional organisation that can bring together all African countries with a stake in this region to address the trans-regional peace and security dynamics that directly affect them.

Despite this unique position, the AU's responses to these political and security dynamics have thus far been reactive. Meanwhile, non-African powers have developed foreign policies specific to the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden region, coveted for its unparalleled geopolitical, strategic and economic significance. These countries, moreover, protect their political and economic interests through their military presence in the area.

As regional competition for influence continues, Africa will remain entangled in the trans-regional security complex of the Arabian Peninsula and beyond. The AU has the potential to provide a mechanism that enables African countries to withstand the destabilising effects of such competition. It can also provide a platform for Africans to define their priorities and set the agenda for trans-regional cooperation.

If the AU is to become a viable multilateral platform in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden region, however, it has to reposition itself so as not to be sidelined in the response to the regional peace and security dynamics that affect its member states.

Articulating African interests

The contest over leadership and dominance among global powers has resulted in competing visions and misaligned priorities for the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden region.

While the interests of the United States (US), European Union (EU) and China, as well as competition among Gulf countries, have been well documented, the interests of relevant African states tend to be divergent and less articulated, at best.

African countries bordering the Red Sea (including Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea and Djibouti) are deeply involved in the Gulf dispute. Most of them have sided with the Saudi Arabia/United Arab Emirates (UAE) alliance in one way or another. As a result they have banned Iran, Qatar and Turkey from using their airspace, as well as sea routes and ports in their territorial waters.

The interests of relevant African states tend to be divergent and less articulated, at best

The nuance in the priorities of African littoral states is also worth noting, beyond Gulf dynamics. They are increasingly driven by a sense of insecurity created by the growing presence of extra-regional powers, and the resultant competition.

African littoral states are trying to protect their exclusive economic zones and their sovereign territories against outside interference. This is one of the reasons they formed the Red Sea Cooperation Council – an alliance between Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia, Eritrea, Egypt, Yemen and Jordan – in 2019.

The council has defined these littoral states as the 'primary stakeholders in the Red Sea region', highlighting the need for a distinction between the right of passage and their sovereignty over their coastal regions.

Littoral states further emphasise that they are the guarantors of the safety and protection of vessels passing through the Red Sea. They reject arguments made by other actors such as the EU, which considers its role in combating piracy as a justification for having a military presence in the region.

Map 1: Countries bordering the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden



Landlocked African countries also concerned

Meanwhile the primary interest of landlocked countries in the region such as Ethiopia, South Sudan and Uganda is to secure access to the sea through littoral states for international trade.

These countries would like to be involved in any initiative regarding the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden region, as they see themselves as primary stakeholders that would be directly affected by any such collective initiatives.

Littoral states emphasise that they are the guarantors of the safety and protection of vessels passing through the Red Sea

Somalia’s priorities in the Gulf of Aden, meanwhile, include halting illegal fishing and dumping of toxic waste in its waters, as well as preventing the illegal trade in weapons. This is hampered by the tension between the central government and the de facto state of Somaliland.

A trans-regional cooperation framework

So far there is no multilateral cooperation framework for the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden region that balances trans-regional competing priorities and addresses common challenges.

In lieu of a multilateral forum, organisations such as the United Nations (UN), EU, AU and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), as well as several countries, have appointed special envoys for the Horn of Africa and Red Sea region.

-
- Saudi Arabia
 - Sudan
 - Djibouti
 - Somalia
 - Eritrea
 - Egypt
 - Yemen
 - Jordan
- THE RED SEA
COOPERATION COUNCIL
-

The AU is spearheading an initiative under the auspices of the AU High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) for Sudan, South Sudan and the Horn of Africa, which could bring together ‘the states of the Red Sea area, the Arabian Peninsula and other concerned international stakeholders’ to reach a consensus on ‘a holistic approach to the challenges facing the region’.

Since 2019 the AUHIP, alongside IGAD and the UN, has held consultations with stakeholders in Somalia, Uganda, the UAE, Qatar and Egypt. The consultations are expected to help stakeholders articulate their priorities, concerns and challenges in relation to the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden region, and develop the principles of engagement. A number of research findings are also expected to complement the consultations, which will be presented to the PSC.

Challenges facing an AU-led forum

While the opportunities that stem from the creation of such a forum are evident, the AU’s Red Sea and Gulf of Aden initiative faces a number of challenges.

The major challenge will be achieving consensus among trans-regional actors that have competing visions for the region, as well as African countries that are themselves embroiled in complex intra-regional political dynamics.

The AU is spearheading an initiative under the auspices of the AU High-Level Implementation Panel for Sudan, South Sudan and the Horn of Africa

Another challenge is defining the membership of such a forum. While the AUHIP’s mandate has called for it to engage stakeholders in the ‘Red Sea area, the Arabian Peninsula and other concerned international stakeholders’, most littoral states, including those on the African coast, are already members of the Red Sea Cooperation Council. They have been sceptical about the involvement of non-littoral states in defining priorities for the Red Sea region, which they consider to be under their jurisdiction.

The third challenge is convincing African states, especially in the Horn of Africa, of the relevance of a multilateral forum organised by the AU. Increasingly these states have sidelined the AU, as well as the UN and IGAD, instead opting for bilateral and trilateral cooperation frameworks. Examples are the Ethiopia–Eritrea rapprochement and associated agreements between Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Other countries have also opted to engage non-regional actors in resolving disputes, such as the Somalia–Kenya dispute over their maritime border, and the Ethiopia–Egypt dispute over the use of Nile waters.

If the AU is to successfully form a holistic multilateral cooperation framework for the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden in collaboration with IGAD and the UN, it will have to overcome these political challenges and develop a consensus-based action plan that amplifies African interests and address common concerns.

AU
UN
EU

HAVE APPOINTED SPECIAL
ENVOYS FOR THE RED
SEA AND HORN OF AFRICA

Why has the AU been silent on the Ethiopian dam dispute?

Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan are currently engaged in vital talks over the dispute relating to the filling and operation of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Nile River. While non-African actors are increasingly present in the negotiations, the African Union (AU) is playing a marginal role.

In addition to supporting negotiations and the implementation of a possible agreement, there are critical lessons from the negotiations for the AU on how to manage future maritime and freshwater disputes.

With the involvement of the United States (US) and the World Bank, the parties have convened over eight rounds of negotiations in two months. Despite making some headway, a conclusive agreement is yet to be signed. Major disputes persist over the timeline of filling the reservoir, and mitigation measures to be taken in case of drought.

Concerns of water insecurity

The Nile River is a trans-boundary resource shared by 11 African countries including Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan. To date though, there is no approved framework on the water's management and use. The countries almost reached an agreement after 10 years of negotiation in 2010. But Egypt and Sudan didn't sign it mainly due to concerns of 'water insecurity' arising from a broader deal affecting their share of water for agriculture, industry and hydroelectric power generation.

In 2011, Ethiopia unilaterally started construction of the dam over the Blue Nile, a major tributary to the Nile. In addition to country-level benefits, Ethiopia claims that the dam has wide significance for regional integration, particularly regarding affordable electricity supply.

While Sudan supports the dam's construction, Egypt initially rejected it because it considers it an existential challenge. Egypt later accepted the project and the three countries signed a negotiated Declaration of Principles agreement in 2015 – the basis for the ongoing technical talks.

After the tripartite agreement, expert-level negotiations on the safety, filling and operation of the dam were progressing among the countries. But the internal political crisis and ensuing regime changes in Ethiopia and Sudan in 2018 and 2019 respectively delayed the process.

International intervention

The delays have led to a resurgence of concerns over regional instability. This was raised by Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi when he addressed the United Nations General Assembly in September 2019, leading to his call for international pressure on Ethiopia. A month later, Egypt declared the talks had reached a dead end and requested international intervention.

Russia facilitated meetings between Egypt and Ethiopia's leaders in Sochi on the sidelines of the Russia-Africa summit in October 2019. The leaders agreed to resume negotiations. Russia's President Vladimir Putin offered his help, but the two countries settled on US and World Bank mediations.

Since November, five rounds of technical negotiations and over three rounds of ministerial-level meetings have been convened

Since November, five rounds of technical negotiations and over three rounds of ministerial-level meetings have been convened. Although high-level US and World Bank officials have attended as 'observers', their role is increasingly seen as providing alternative courses of action to the impasse. After the last round of negotiations, the US said the countries would sign the agreement by the end of February. It now seems more time is needed to finalise the deal.

The AU has the primary responsibility to promote peace, security and stability in Africa – anchored in the principle of 'African solutions to Africa's problems'. However it hasn't featured highly in the dam negotiations, with non-African actors instead becoming part of the solution. This is a missed opportunity considering that the AU's multilateral nature and aspirations to lead on regional stability make it a more neutral arbiter.

The AU's silence on the issue, at least in public, was especially evident when tensions escalated between Egypt and Ethiopia. The two countries exchanged provocative statements including threats to use military measures to resolve the dispute. In response, the Arab Parliament expressed its concern and offered support to Egypt and Sudan.

Throughout all of this, the AU didn't issue a single statement. In March 2019 the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) encouraged member states to find peaceful solutions, but the council has since failed to discuss the dispute.

This may show a lack of determination by the AU and its member states to resolve disputes while invoking the rhetoric of 'African solutions to Africa's problems'. But the AU may have other reasons for its silence.

A complex problem for the AU

According to Institute for Security Studies Senior Research Fellow Andrews Atta-Asamoah, the AU doesn't have a history of pronouncing itself on sensitive issues. And politics on the PSC means that member states often refrain from placing difficult topics on the council's agenda, says Atta-Asamoah. Any 'wrong move' affects the neutrality, acceptance and utility of the AU in the minds of some member states.

The AU perhaps doesn't have the appetite to engage in sensitive dispute resolution between two such influential member states

An African diplomat who wishes to remain anonymous suggested to ISS Today that the AU perhaps doesn't have the appetite to engage in sensitive dispute resolution between two such influential member states. He also says the AU may lack the capacity to mediate such a complex, technical problem.

But the AU does in fact have the means to support the resolution of such disputes. It could back the negotiation process from the beginning as well as the amicable enforcement of the agreement that emerges. Revisiting the process around these negotiations could help the AU resolve similar maritime and freshwater disputes in future.

The AU and AU Commission chairs could also use their positions to support the negotiations. Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed recently asked South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa – the AU's 2020 chair – to mediate its disputes with Egypt. This could be a step towards home-grown solutions.

The AU should reflect on the extent and timeliness of its responses to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam negotiations to ensure it isn't sidelined in future processes involving its member states. It may not always be the lead actor, but the AU's presence is important to ensure African ownership and leadership in promoting continental peace and security.

2015

THE FIRST AGREEMENT
ON THE NILE WATERS

PSC Interview: South Africa's priorities for 2020

South Africa has a lot on its plate as chair of the African Union (AU) for 2020. The *PSC Report* spoke to South Africa's ambassador in Addis Ababa Xolisa Makaya about these priorities and how the country plans to tackle them in the coming months.

As part of the 2020 theme of the AU, 'Silencing the Guns', South Africa has announced it will focus on the conflict in South Sudan and Libya. How does South Africa plan to contribute to the efforts to resolve these conflicts?

South Africa is determined to contribute to on-going efforts of the AU to resolve conflicts in South Sudan, Libya, and other countries affected by conflict.

Regarding Libya, South Africa calls for the active involvement of the AU in the resolution of the Libyan crisis. The AU cannot be a spectator to the Libyan crisis, which has a direct impact on the security of the continent, particularly the Sahel region. As a member of the AU High-Level Committee on Libya, South Africa will continue to support the efforts of this committee, which is ably led by President Denis Sasso N'Guesso. To strengthen the AU efforts, a Contact Group on Libya has been established as per the decision of the 33rd AU Assembly. South Africa is one of the members of the Contact Group.

The Contact Group, working with the United Nations (UN), is expected to assist the people of Libya to unite and reconcile. In this regard, a National Reconciliation Conference is expected to be held during the course of the year. Over and above, that, the AU will be and should be involved in all the negotiations for ceasefire and political dialogue.

On South Sudan, South Africa welcomes the formation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) and commends the political leaders for taking this bold step to form the transitional government. The formation of the transitional government paves the way for the rebuilding of the country and [engenders] hope that the formation of the R-TGoNU will permanently silence the guns in South Sudan. We also commend the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) for its efforts in supporting the peace process in South Sudan.

As a member and chair of the AU High-Level Ad Hoc Committee on South Sudan, South Africa will continue to ensure that the AU plays its supportive role in the peace process in South Sudan. In addition, Deputy President David Mabuza, in his capacity as President Cyril Ramaphosa's Special Envoy to South Sudan, working with IGAD Special Envoys, will also continue to support the people of South Sudan to achieve lasting peace and stability.

The AU cannot be a spectator to the Libyan crisis, which has a direct impact on the security of the continent

South Sudan must embark on the required Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) programme. In this regard, the AU and the international community will need to continue to support and accompany the people of South Sudan on their journey to permanent peace, stability and sustainable development, as well as to continue to provide humanitarian assistance.

What does South Africa plan to do regarding the spread of violent extremism in the Sahel region of Africa?

South Africa and the continent are gravely concerned about the spread of terrorism and violent extremism taking place in some regions on the continent.

To firmly address the scourge of terrorism and violent extremism would require close collaboration among AU member states in terms of sharing intelligence information and strengthening early warning mechanisms. It is against this background that the 33rd AU Summit decided to deploy 3 000 troops in order to further degrade terrorist groups in the Sahel region. It is expected that this development will enhance ongoing military efforts dealing with the menace of terrorism and violent extremism.

What will be the agenda during the Extraordinary Summit to Silence the Guns in South Africa in May 2020?

South Africa will host the Extraordinary Summit on Silencing of the Guns on 30 May 2020, where it is expected that the heads of state will have an in-depth discussion on the issues and emerging trends pertaining to peace and security on the continent, as well as review the implementation of the AU Master Roadmap, and expectedly determine a new roadmap on silencing the guns.

What other initiatives is South Africa planning in relation to the theme of the year, 'Silencing the guns, creating conducive conditions for Africa's development'?

Firstly, promote and support integration, economic development, trade and investment in the continent.

South Africa will host the Extraordinary Summit on the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in May 2020, to adopt legal instruments that will enable trading under the AfCFTA, starting from July 2020. The AfCFTA will enable intra-African trade, reignite industrialisation and pave the way for Africa's integration into the global economy as a player of considerable scale.

The summit will be held back-to-back with the Extraordinary Summit on Silencing of the Guns.

Considering the multifaceted nature of the drivers of conflict and insecurity, it is believed that the full implementation of the AfCFTA will contribute to the resolution of the conflicts on the continent. The AfCFTA is arguably the single initiative that could potentially set the continent on the path to economic prosperity, taking into account the promising estimated growth projected by economists.

Secondly, drive the implementation of the Presidential Infrastructure Champion Initiative in support of the AfCFTA.

It is a fact that Africa has a huge deficit with regard to infrastructure. President Ramaphosa plans to drive the implementation of the Presidential Infrastructure Champion Initiative and in this regard a High-Level Forum on Infrastructure will be organised in South Africa to help mobilise funding for the identified infrastructure projects on the continent. The success of the AfCFTA depends to a large extent on infrastructure development.

Thirdly, advance women's economic empowerment and gender equality.

Since the year 2020 coincides with the Decade of African Women, South Africa will use the chairmanship to fight for women's economic and financial inclusion, for an end to gender-based violence, and to ensure accountability to global gender commitments. South Africa will work closely with President Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana, in his capacity as the AU champion for gender equality, to ensure that the interests of women are mainstreamed. President Ramaphosa has declared 2020 to 2030 the Decade of African Women's Financial and Economic Inclusion. Two high-level conferences on women's empowerment and gender equality will be held in South Africa in July/August 2020.

30 May 2020

AN EXTRAORDINARY AU
SUMMIT IN SOUTH AFRICA

First will be the conference on women's economic empowerment and financial inclusion, and second the Africa conference on violence and sexual harassment leading to the AU Convention on Violence against Women.

Fourthly, President Ramaphosa has taken over the chair of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). The APRM is an important initiative that supports good governance and democracy on the continent. Good governance and democratisation on the continent is quite critical for the prosperity of the people of Africa. 2020 will see over a dozen countries going to the polls. It is hoped that all these elections will be peaceful, free and fair.

In his acceptance speech, President Ramaphosa reaffirmed the desire to have universal accession [to the APRM] by 2030, while at the same time commending those countries that have gone through reviews and congratulating those that have just acceded to the Mechanism.

The APRM is an important initiative that supports good governance and democracy on the continent

Finally, South Africa's international cooperation must extend to the continental effort to address the climate crisis, which has a huge impact on Africa and other developing countries. As chair of the Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change (CAHOSCC), South Africa will prioritise all three global goals in the Paris Agreement, namely mitigation, adaptation and support. As the chair, we will equally advocate for enhanced resource flows into Africa to address environment and climate change issues facing the continent, including scaled-up support for Africa's flagship programmes.

What is South Africa's priority in terms of the AU reform agenda?

As chair of the AU, South Africa will have to monitor the implementation of the AU reform programme and it hopes that the work of the Panel of Eminent African Persons responsible for the pre-selection of the AU Commission's senior leadership, expected to be elected in February 2021, will proceed smoothly.

South Africa has announced the operationalisation of the AfCFTA as one of its key priorities as chair of the AU. What are the expected opportunities and challenges in this regard?

Opportunities arising from the AfCFTA are immense. The AfCFTA will enable intra-African trade, reignite industrialisation and pave the way for Africa's integration into the global economy as a player of considerable scale.

The AfCFTA provides the opportunity for Africa to create the world's largest free trade area; to increase intra-African trade in manufactured and other value-added products; to make Africa a single market of 1.2 billion people and with a cumulative GDP over \$3.4 trillion. The implementation of the agreement could increase intra-African trade by 52% by 2022.

The political will demonstrated by heads of state as well as member states not only to sign this important agreement but also to ensure that it is entered into force has been an added advantage. The AfCFTA's strong political backing is evidenced by the speed at which the continent negotiated the agreement.

The process of setting up the Secretariat, in Ghana, has already started with the appointment of the Secretary-General and the expected recruitment process to appoint other officers, approval of the structure and operational budget. Some challenges do exist, though. Infrastructure development remains a challenge to the operationalisation of the AfCFTA. The poor state of connectivity and development in the areas of Internet, road, railways and airline transport and energy poses a threat to the efficient operationalisation of the AfCFTA. Peace and security challenges present obvious challenges as well.

How can South Africa leverage its non-permanent membership in the UN Security Council (UNSC) in advancing African priorities?

South Africa will continue to work to enhance better cooperation between the UN and the AU based on General Assembly Resolution 61/296 and the joint framework for enhanced partnership in peace and security. The A3 (South Africa, Niger and Tunisia) and the AU Peace and Security Council need to keep a dynamic interaction to advance AU-UN cooperation in critical areas such as peace and security. In this context, South Africa will use these platforms to leverage its membership to the UNSC to advance African priorities, which include resolution of conflicts on the continent, etc.

About the PSC Report

The Peace and Security Council Report analyses developments and decisions at the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC). The monthly publication is the only one of its kind dedicated to providing current analysis of the PSC's work. It is written by a team of ISS analysts in Addis Ababa.

About the ISS

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) partners to build knowledge and skills that secure Africa's future. Our goal is to enhance human security as a means to achieve sustainable peace and prosperity. Using its networks and influence, the ISS provides timely and credible analysis, practical training and technical assistance to governments and civil society.

Contributors to this issue

Mohamed Diatta, ISS Addis Ababa researcher

Liesl Louw-Vaudran, ISS senior research consultant

Andrews Attah-Asamoah, ISS senior research fellow

Shewit Woldemichael, ISS Addis Ababa researcher

Roba D Sharamo, ISS Addis Ababa regional director

Meressa K Dessu, ISS Addis Ababa senior researcher and training coordinator

Dawit Yohannes, ISS Addis Ababa senior researcher

Contact

Liesl Louw-Vaudran

Consultant to the *PSC Report*

ISS Pretoria

Email: llouw@issafrica.org

Acknowledgements



The publication of the PSC Report is made possible through support from the Government of the Netherlands, the Government of Denmark and the Hanns Seidel Foundation. The ISS is also grateful for the support of the following members of the ISS Partnership Forum: the Hanns Seidel Foundation, the European Union and the governments of Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the USA.

© 2020, Institute for Security Studies

Copyright in the volume as a whole is vested in the Institute for Security Studies and the authors, and no part may be reproduced in whole or in part without the express permission, in writing, of both the authors and the publishers.

The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the ISS, its trustees, members of the Advisory Council or donors. Authors contribute to ISS publications in their personal capacity.

ISSN 2075-6232

