CONFLICT PREVENTION IN AFRICA:
THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT OR PLAN OF ACTION?

by Mark Malan[1]

KAIPTC Paper, No. 3, February 2005

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

Africa is a continent of some 30 million km^2 and a population of about 830 million people - more than 40 percent of whom live on less than $1 a day. About 6,500 Africans die each day of AIDS, while 200 million others face chronic hunger. With a combined debt of $305 billion, Africa accounts for just 1 percent of foreign direct investment, 1 percent of world GDP and less than 2 percent of world trade. Foreign aid to the continent is around $22 billion a year. This is a significant amount of money, but even if the sum were doubled, and the continent's entire debt wiped out, Africa would still face a $19 billion shortfall. Moreover, the continent's home-grown economic rescue plan, the New Partnership for Africa's Development, would cost a staggering $64 billion a year to implement.[2]

The chronic and longstanding structural weaknesses in many African countries may not precipitate violent conflict, but they do generate ongoing and pervasive instability that threatens internal collapse. Political instability, although sometimes accompanied by violence, is qualitatively different from war. Instability is simply a manifestation of societal dysfunction, of discontent and institutional weakness. War or violent conflict is violence that is orchestrated and sustained; it involves two or more opposing actors engaged in a dynamic process of mobilization and escalation of conflict towards war. Such processes have occurred in countries such as Angola, Liberia and Sierra Leone, where insurgent movements or rebellions have not only rivaled juridical states as units of coercion, but have also emerged as competing centres of security. In all these cases, local warlords managed to control a geographic area and establish commercial activities within it, while keeping weak central authorities at bay through armed resistance. In cases like Somalia and DR Congo, we have seen the demise, in all but name, of the territorial bureaucratic state. The success of the New Forces in appropriating half the territory of Cote d' Ivoire points to the fragility of even 'successful' African states as units of security.

These African conflicts have deep-rooted causes, such as the legacy of colonialism which includes extractive patterns of economic development and lack of coincidence between nation and state; ethnic tensions and the suppression of minorities; corrupt and dictatorial regimes; support for such regimes by international arms traders, big powers and neighbouring country meddlers; chronic poverty and underdevelopment, and a grinding debt burden. Whatever the causes, the fact remains that a succession of civil and regional wars in sub-Saharan Africa have wrecked national structures within an alarming number of countries.

The conditions that led to and resulted from these wars gave rise to calls for a more holistic approach to African peace and security challenges – one that went beyond military and security priorities to address issues of governance, legitimacy, political and social inclusiveness, and economic equity. It became widely accepted that international assistance would have to extend way beyond military peacekeeping interventions if host societies are to be made resilient to new rounds of violent conflict.

The strategic and operational challenge became one of how to pull together the various elements of international assistance with relief and development, and how to leverage the short-term presence of peacekeeping forces to create the building blocks for a sustainable peace.[3]

International responses to the challenge were informed by the ambitions of *An Agenda for Peace*[4], which basically subsumed the official mandates of United Nations departments and agencies under the rubric of post conflict peace-building. Their resources were deployed in pursuit of an ambitious but strategically undifferentiated set of goals, as the final phase of international assistance with conflict resolution.

Once the potential components of international peace-building had been reasonably identified, attention shifted from the strategic issues of where, when and how to prevent or manage conflicts, to the operational challenges of linking together the activities of a multiplicity of organizations, agencies and actors at the international, regional and national levels – all with different mandates, budgets and cultures. The ensuing focus on the mechanics and techniques of co-operation and co-ordination in pursuit of an elusive unity of effort has tended to displace efforts at determining strategic conflict prevention priorities and translating these into meaningful action at the operational level.

While the concept of conflict prevention originally focused on preventing the outbreak of war, extant approaches attempt also to target the structural causes of instability. In the absence of international legal instruments to reconstruct failed or failing states, or to establish more than one sovereign entity from the existing boundaries of such states, the concept of conflict prevention has come to embrace an amorphous set of activities that has produced few tangible results.

The aim of this paper is to critically examine the concept of conflict prevention as a viable means for enhancing peace and security in Africa, in order to suggest meaningful points of engagement for concerned donors and partners. It does so against the background of seemingly ubiquitous conflict potential, and a brief conceptual analysis of conflict prevention and peace-building. This framework is then applied to perceived national capacities for preventing violent conflict; and the regional capacities for conflict prevention that are intrinsic to the emergent African security architecture – including the implicit long-term preventive effects of enhanced governance standards expected from the African peer review mechanism.

CONFLICT PREVENTION

Although the notion of conflict prevention is intrinsic to the UN Charter, it first gained expression as an international *activity* through the efforts of former Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. *An Agenda for Peace* linked conflict prevention, quite restrictively, to the concept of *preventive diplomacy*. Preventive diplomacy was defined as "action to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur".[5] It involves the techniques of persuasion, of negotiation and political manipulation to persuade hostile parties to do things which (at least at the beginning of the process) they do not wish to do. This is very difficult to achieve, and is also very sensitive and therefore best done in secret.

Because most of Africa's actual and potential conflicts are internal ones, preventive diplomacy, or international attempts to broker peace are often less than successful. The jurisprudence and

methodology of this kind of conflict prevention and management was established mostly in the context of conflict between independent sovereign states. There are far fewer rules to go by in the case of internal conflict.

As one of the parties in an internal conflict is likely to be an internationally recognised government, third parties who want to help are likely to be blocked by government objections to interference in sovereign internal affairs. Equally problematic is the fact that the causes of conflict are most often politically sensitive issues: the quality of governance; the way law and order is maintained; the equity of the economic and social systems; and issues such as ethnic discrimination.

The nature of the other party to the conflict also hampers attempts at brokering peace: it is normally an insurgent movement or movements, amply supplied with arms, obsessively secretive, inexperienced in negotiation, without transparent lines of authority, undisciplined, violent, and unfamiliar with the norms of international behaviour, including humanitarian law. Thus, preventive diplomacy, although an excellent idea, is very difficult to execute.[6]

The notion of conflict prevention was thus expanded, albeit implicitly, beyond the realm of preventive diplomacy in Secretary-General Kofi Annan's 1998 report on *The Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Livelihoods in Africa*.[7] In 2001, Annan placed conflict prevention centre-stage with the release of his seminal report on *The Prevention of Armed Conflict*.[8] This report prompted the UN system to embark on a new generation of conflict prevention activities. However, the report clearly states that conflict prevention is the primary responsibility of member states, and that the primary role of the UN is to support national efforts and help build national capacity for conflict prevention. Annan pointed out that although development assistance itself cannot prevent or terminate conflict, it can strengthen a society's capacity for managing and resolving tensions. In similar vein, the August 2000 Brahimi Report had stipulated that development work should be viewed through a "conflict prevention lens" which focuses on long-term prevention through addressing the structural sources of conflict.[9]

Development agencies themselves began to buy into the expanded notion of conflict prevention. According to the United Nations Development Programme: "*Taking a conflict sensitive approach to development programming may also increase the effectiveness of development assistance. Development interventions - without a conflict prevention lens - may inadvertently exacerbate or reinforce conflict dynamics, through increasing competition for resources, introducing new institutions that challenge existing ones or helping to perpetuate structures of dominance, for example.*"[10]

The process of broadening the notion of conflict prevention over the course of a decade – from preventive diplomacy to elimination of root causes through development assistance – has made it difficult to clearly identify which particular activities actually constitute conflict prevention. Conflict prevention is presently understood within the UN system as the broad range of actions that address structural risk factors, and prevent the escalation of tension into deadly and destabilizing conflict - in addition to preventing the continuation of conflict or its the recurrence. This definition encompasses the entire timeframe of any conflict cycle and also embraces the concepts of conflict management, conflict resolution, peace making, peace-building and post

conflict recovery. The need for conflict prevention therefore never ends, and potential entry points are limitless.[11]

Whereas conflict prevention of the preventive diplomacy, preventive deployment or peace-making kind concentrates on halting imminent violence, the expanded form of conflict prevention implies a focus on structural risk factors that are deeply embedded and require early and long-term response. However, structural factors in the form of poverty, inequality, and weak governance institutions point to traditional development challenges as well as potential conditions for violent conflict. Conflict prevention that targets structural factors thus risks referring to all development assistance – unless a more comprehensive and refined concept of structural risk factors is developed; one that acknowledges that violent conflict arises from deep societal dysfunction and suggests a focus on preventing the breakdown or further erosion of society.

Failure to do so with a high degree of rigor and clarity will mean that conflict prevention will remain less a tool than a tool-box - a very expensive and jumbled one at that. Compounding the situation is the proliferation of overlapping and sometime competing concepts that are equally ill-defined – such as 'peace-building' and 'state-building'.

PEACE-BUILDING

According to the International Peace Academy, peace is: "A condition that exists in the relations between groups, classes or states when there is an absence of violence (direct or indirect) or the threat of violence." Direct violence is, in turn, defined as "a condition that exists when human beings deliberately kill or physically injure other human beings", while indirect violence is "a condition which exists when the physical and psychological conditions of some groups, classes or states is inferior to that of others".[12] However, Doyle rightly points to the fact that "one cannot define peace as nothing short of economic justice or social harmony without losing an understanding of peace as something different from and, possibly, less demanding than those other worthwhile goals".[13] The bottom line is that "… it does appear difficult, if not impossible, to secure the higher, more dynamic aspects of peace before the lower aspects of law and order are met" [14].

Peace-building was originally presented in *An Agenda for Peace* as something that would indeed address, as priority, the lower aspects of law and order. It was seen as a post-conflict process, or set of activities that are now commonly accepted and incorporated in the mandates of most multidimensional UN peace operations: disarmament and the restoration of order; destruction of weapons; repatriation of refugees; advisory and training support for security personnel; election monitoring; efforts to protect and promote human rights; and reforming or strengthening governmental institutions and promoting formal and informal processes of political participation.[15] The term 'peace-building' also included strong elements of state-building as well as reference to the centrality of 'good governance'. According to *An Agenda for Peace*:

"*There is a new requirement for technical assistance which the United Nations has an obligation to develop and provide when requested: support for the transformation of deficient national structures and capabilities, and for the strengthening of new democratic institutions. The authority of the United Nations system to act in this field would rest on the consensus that social peace is as important as strategic or political peace. There is an obvious connection between democratic practices - such as the rule of law and transparency in decision-making - and the achievement of true peace and security in any new and stable political order. These elements of good governance need to be promoted at all levels of international and national political communities.*" [16]

While the UN increasingly undertakes peace operations that seek to build or re-build the institutions of a state, there is surprisingly little clarity about the nature of the state sought to be built, and how success should be measured. Though rarely explicitly stated, it is assumed that post-conflict states ought to take the form of liberal democracies, based on such values as democratic and secular forms of government, adherence to rule of law and constitutionalism, respect for human rights and gender equality. Such values are increasingly recognised as having universal applicability, even in countries and regions where the traditional pre-conditions for viable democracy have never existed. [17]

Despite the daunting and largely unmet challenges of the post conflict state-building project, the concept of peace-building has been expanded further to include a wide variety of projects aimed more at host populations and 'civil society' than at the organs of state. Peace-building is now seen to include activities such as the facilitation of interaction among former enemies, the inculcation of respect for human rights and political pluralism, and the accommodation of ethnic and cultural diversity. Moreover, like conflict prevention, it is considered as both a pre-conflict and a post-conflict process or set of activities:

"*At its core, peace building aims at the prevention and resolution of violent conflicts, the consolidation of peace once violence has been reduced, and post-conflict reconstruction with a view to avoiding a relapse into violent conflict. Peace building seeks to address the proximate and root causes of contemporary conflicts, including structural, political, socio-cultural, economic and environmental factors.*" [18]

The conceptual merging of peace-building and conflict prevention is also apparent in the Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, which highlights the fact that "… there is no place in the United Nations system explicitly designed to avoid State collapse and the slide to war or to assist countries in their transition from war to peace." [19] The Panel therefore recommended that the Security Council establish a Peacebuilding Commission, whose core function should be to identify countries which are under stress and risk sliding towards state collapse; to organize, in partnership with the national government, proactive assistance in preventing that process from developing further; to assist in the planning for transitions between conflict and post-conflict peacebuilding; and in particular to marshal and sustain the efforts of the international community in post-conflict peacebuilding. [20]

The broad definition of both conflict prevention and peace-building to include any activity that addresses structural and societal risk factors to prevent the escalation of tension into violent

conflict in addition to preventing the reoccurrence of conflict is thus open-ended and highly elastic. This elasticity has encouraged the funding of a wide variety of activities being undertaken the ground which are justified by affixing the label of 'conflict prevention' or, more commonly, 'peace-building'. Although many activities may share an identity with conflict prevention and peace-building, they vary so widely that it is often difficult to comprehend how they are related to *preventing violent conflict*.

PREVENTING VIOLENT CONFLICT: NATIONAL CAPACITIES

Kofi Annan's report on Preventing Violent Conflict focuses on building national capacities to prevent conflict before it becomes violent. Conflict prevention is designated as the responsibility of governments and societies. However, there is a marked absence of substantive analysis as to what capacities for conflict prevention are. As with the very concept of conflict prevention, the notion of conflict prevention capacities gives rise to a host of questions that must be answered if substance is to be provided. For example:

- How are capacities for conflict prevention different from capacities for development or governance?

- Are capacities for conflict prevention rather those that focus on assessing the causes of conflict, managing tensions and disputes, and taking action to resolve conflicts before they escalate into violence?

- Whose capacities are key to conflict prevention – the government, the state, civil society, the civil service, academia, or community groups?

- What are the capacities – are they skills, mechanisms, institutions, practices, procedures, values, abilities, or systems?

In the absence of meaningful answers to such questions, national capacities have come to denote anything that is not an activity or responsibility of the international community. They refer firstly to the country in question, and secondly to particular actors, usually simply identified as government and civil society, who become the targets of capacity building. This conception and approach reduces the challenges of preventing conflict in potentially dysfunctional countries and societies to a range of 'benign' capacity-building interventions aimed at government, civil society, and a supposed effective partnership between the two. However, the notion of civil society in most African countries is a nebulous one and is certainly stretched way beyond its conventional application in Western polities. Too often, it is simply equated with NGOs.[21]

Current approaches not only fail to explain what conflict prevention capacity is, they are also vague on exactly what it takes to build capacity of any nature. Originally described as technical assistance, capacity building was designed to address a narrow range of organizational activities. There are now numerous definitions and usages for the phrase "capacity building" within the literature. In the development context, the UNDP has explained capacity-building at the national level as follows:

"Specifically, capacity building encompasses the country's human, scientific, technological, organizational, institutional and resource capabilities. A fundamental goal of capacity building is to enhance the ability to evaluate and address the crucial questions related to policy choices and modes of implementation among development options, based on an understanding of environment potentials and limits and of needs perceived by the people of the country concerned".[22]

However, there may be few policy choices available to African governments, and the basic economic needs of the people are often well understood, but just as often subjugated to those in the constituencies of far more powerful and capable governments abroad. Take Mali, for example – a country at the crossroads of sub-Saharan Africa, that has over the past decade made tremendous gains as far as democratic principles and human rights are concerned. But Mali's democracy is built on very shaky foundations. Per capita GDP is $300, sixty-four percent of the 11 million inhabitants live in poverty, the illiteracy rate is 54 percent, and population growth rate is a very high 2.4 percent.

Mali's economy depends on agriculture. It is Africa's largest cotton producer, with an output of 600,000 metric tons in 2003. Yet Mali has no textile industry and processes only 1 percent of its cotton consumption. The country boasts 9 million cattle and 16 million sheep and goats, but does not export a single kilogram of meat due to a lack of infrastructure. Development priorities and policy choices should be clear to development 'partners' like the United States and the European Union, whose subsidies to their own cotton farmers continue to condemn Malians to poverty.[23]

If conflict prevention deals with structural causes, then surely these should include global terms of trade, and not be confined to structural deficiencies at the *national level*. However, those who have the power to address the international structural causes of underdevelopment in Africa remain intransigent. Their cop-out has been promoting the notion of "African solutions to African problems" and supporting a drive to build indigenous regional capacities for *conflict prevention*, management and resolution.

REGIONAL CAPACITIES FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION

Traditionally, regionalism implies co-operation among states in geographically proximate and delimited areas for the pursuit of mutual gain in one or more issue areas. In most of the successful examples of regionalism, states that are already partners to solid political processes (based on shared and complimentary values) devolve collective decisions to structures that supplement, rather than supplant, national institutions. Whilst regionalism may over time lead to the creation of new political organisations, regionalism and state strength do not stand in opposition to one another – they are, or should be, complementary.

In Africa, all regional organizations have one thing in common – they are composed predominantly of weak states. The notion of African solutions to Africa's problems would have

greater resonance if these problems were indeed of Africa's own making, if African regional institutions had the substantive capacity to formulate clear and realistic conflict prevention goals and strategies, and if they had the means to implement them. None of these conditions apply. The roots of Africa's development and security problems are clearly complex and cannot be understood or resolved in isolation from historical and present international forces and processes.

As stated by Nigerian President Obasanjo in July 2003, "*Africa's prospects for growth and development are affected by the trends prevailing in the global community. The most important recent developments are the emergence of the global war on terrorism, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. International security issues have supplanted other priorities on the global agenda. The fear is that this may eclipse the focus on poverty and underdevelopment, particularly in Africa …*"[24]

While Obasanjo currently chairs the African Union, the AU Commission is the engine of the Union and the quality of the ten elected Commissioners is key to the functioning of the AU. The first Chairperson of the Commission (with equivalent responsibilities to those of the UN Secretary-General) is former President of Mali Alpha Oumar Konare, who together with Deputy Chairperson Patrick Mazimhaka (Rwanda) and the eight other Commissioners, assumed office on 1 September 2003.[25]

The Department for Peace and Security, under Commissioner for Peace and Security Saïd Djinnit (Algeria), services the engagement of the Union in conflict prevention and mitigation. The overall objective of the Department is the maintenance of peace, security and stability through the co-ordination and promotion of African and other initiatives on conflict prevention, management and resolution. Specifically, it is incumbent upon Commissioners Konare and Djinnit to implement the decisions of the AU's Peace and Security Council, which is designated as the "*… standing decision-making organ for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts… a collective security and early warning arrangement to facilitate timely and efficient response to conflict and crisis situations in Africa.*"[26]

Implementation also depends on support from and co-operation with a number of "subsidiary" conflict management mechanisms. Various efforts have been made at the sub-regional level in Africa by what are essentially economic-oriented organizations, to establish common policies on defence and security issues; and consequently, a number of instruments have been adopted and mechanisms established at the regional level by these organizations to deal with regional issues of defence, security, and conflict management. The AU has recognized five main sub-regions in Africa, and one corresponding regional organisation (Regional Economic Community) seems to be taking the lead in conflict prevention and management in each.[27]

Article 16 of the PSC Protocol deals with the way in which the relationship between regional mechanisms and the Peace and Security Council can be structured. It articulates a basic vision in which the "Regional Mechanisms" are regarded as part of the overall security architecture of the African Union, which has the primary responsibility for promoting peace, security and stability in Africa. Accordingly, the Peace and Security Council, together with the Chairperson of the Commission, is to harmonize and co-ordinate the activities of the regional mechanisms and ensure that these activities are consistent with the objectives and principles of the Union; and to

work closely with the regional mechanisms to ensure effective partnership between them and the Peace and Security Council. The Peace and Security Council is also to promote initiatives aimed at anticipating and preventing conflicts, as well as carrying out peace-making and peace-building functions, in consultation with regional mechanisms.

The key to effective anticipation and prevention of conflicts, as envisaged by the AU and the regional mechanisms, is the development of conflict early warning indicators and systems, which would enable timely decision making on early or preventive actions. Article 12 of the PSC Protocol deals with the establishment of a Continental Early Warning System that will consist of an observation and monitoring centre, or "Situation Room", responsible for data collection and analysis on the basis of an "appropriate early warning indicators module". The latter is to be based on clearly defined and accepted political, economic, social, military and humanitarian indicators, which will be used as a framework for analyzing conflict potential. The Chairperson of the Commission is to use the information gathered and processed by the Early Warning System to provide timely advice to the Peace and Security Council on potential conflicts and threats to peace and security in Africa, and to recommend to the Council the best course of action.

Article 12 specifies that the effective functioning of the AU's Early Warning System also depends on the observation and monitoring units of the regional mechanisms, which will collect and process data at their level and transmit it to the Situation Room through "appropriate means of communication". The regional mechanism that has made the most progress in developing overall conflict prevention and management capacity, as well as an early warning capacity, is ECOWAS. The Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, adopted in 1999, provides for an ECOWAS Early Warning System. An Observation and Monitoring Centre at the Secretariat in Abuja is regarded as the hub of a system that has four Observation and Monitoring Zones within the sub-region, to collect and analyze data on a series of conflict indicators. ECOWAS has deployed a zonal head and small office to a capital city in each of the zones, as follows:

- Zone 1 (Banjul, Gambia): Cape Verde, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal
- Zone 2 (Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso): Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger
- Zone 3 (Monrovia, Liberia): Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone
- Zone 4 (Cotonou, Benin): Benin, Nigeria, Togo

However, the Zonal Bureaus responsible for collection, analysis and dissemination of information are not yet functional. The problem is that there is no one to convert raw, unrelated data into useful, predictive information. There is no one to process whatever data is collected, templates are non-existent, no one has been formally trained or certified in data analysis, and there is neither suitable computer hardware nor software (including statistical programmes such as SPSS). There have therefore been calls by major donors to ECOWAS to adjust the current zonal approach in favour of a more centralised collection and analysis function.

Effective early warning system requires more than the timely provision and sharing of relevant information. The 'product' should be the formulation and communication of policy options for the Executive Secretary – and for onward transmission to the AU. This would require the collection and analysis of data in a uniform and systematic way, according to a commonly shared methodology approved and adopted by the continental Early Warning System. However, despite a number of expert workshops on the issue, the latter has not yet been developed and the AU's early warning capacity currently consists of two professional staff and six interns working within the situation room in Addis Ababa.[28]

In fact, there is much skepticism about the efficacy of all existing or proposed early warning systems for Africa, with their emphasis on the value of producing reports to communicate warnings of potential crisis points and conflict trends. The critics of early warning systems hold that there is an abundance of evidence of a slide towards state failure and potential for violent conflict in a number of countries (Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea and Zimbabwe, for example) – but that there is also a marked absence of early and concerted preventive action by regional mechanisms. While the AU and some of the regional mechanisms have taken a hard line on *coups d'état* or unconstitutional regime changes, they remain reluctant to censure member states in which there are clear indicators of extremely poor governance.

The focus and investment in early warning has therefore been towards meeting the challenges of collecting information, of analysis, and of the writing, editing and dissemination of reports. In the process, sight has been lost of the importance of the system and flow of information, and the link to policy action. The result has been the production of a variety of reports which often do not succeed in producing useful and timely information, that do not form part of an institutionalized system of information provision, and that are marginalized and separated from the decision-making process.

In this regard, Article 12 of the AU's PSC Protocol simply specifies that: "*The Member States shall commit themselves to facilitate early action by the Peace and Security Council and or the Chairperson of the Commission based on early warning information.*" However, such early action has never been conceived or applied by regional mechanisms in the form of sufficiently robust (or coercive) diplomacy to deflect any African government from a course of self-destruction. Rather, early action is conceived narrowly as the rapid deployment of peacekeeping forces to deal with armed conflicts that have already erupted – and then only with the consent of the host government.[29]

The reliance on peacekeeping forces as the primary agent of 'early' response is evidenced by the AU's push to establish, by 2010, an African Standby Force (ASF) capable of rapid deployment in order to back the resolutions of the Council. The force is to comprise of standby brigades in each of the five African regions, a factor which again emphasizes the centrality of the regional mechanisms to the success or failure of the continental security architecture. At this stage, the regional standby brigades exist only on paper, and only in three of the regions.

In Eastern Africa, the Chiefs of Defence Staff held a meeting in Uganda in February 2004, where they adopted a Policy Framework for the Establishment of an Eastern Africa Standby Brigade

(EASBRIG). In Central Africa, the ministers of defence of ECCAS, meeting in Congo-Brazzaville on 18 December 2004, agreed to create a regional military command with a brigade of around 2,400 troops.[30] In West Africa, concept plans have been drafted for the establishment of an ECOWAS Standby Brigade (ECOBRIG), and there has been some progress towards implementation. One of the reasons for slow progress in establishing viable standby forces is the need to deal with ongoing conflicts that absorb much of the energy and resources of the regional mechanisms. For example, the AU has been required to mount operations in Burundi and Darfur, and ECOWAS has been preoccupied with emergency responses to armed conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire and in Liberia, whilst also supporting AU and UN operations.

Moreover, all the regional mechanisms in Africa are resource starved and cash-strapped – none more so than the African Union itself. At the 2004 AU summit, African heads of state endorsed Konare's three-year strategic plan for developing the Union and the continent, and making it more resilient to further armed conflict. The plan includes a $200 million peace fund[31], a $30 million pan-African parliament, and a $3 million court of justice. In addition, some $600 million is to be ploughed over three years into the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

However, the heads of state did not commit themselves to Konare's proposed $600 million annual implementation budget. This is hardly surprising, given that member states had paid up only $13 million of the AU's $43 million annual budget for 2004. While it was suggested that the finances needed to create a new-look Africa and AU can be raised by way of member states paying 0.5 percent of their national budgets, constitutional laws would preclude any head of state from making this kind of pledge without first putting it before their own legislature.[32] While there are some African countries with significant resources, hardly any of them see international cooperation as a policy priority, especially when it comes to paying for it.

The United Nations has experienced very mixed success in dealing with the post-Cold War challenges of conflict prevention. How can poorly resourced and politically weak African organizations be expected to adequately respond to such challenges in a coherent, consistent, and reliable manner? While a number of projects aim to bolster the weak institutional, financial and human resource capacity of the AU and regional mechanisms like ECOWAS and SADC, these do not address the sources of these weaknesses that lie in the constituent member states themselves. Again, there is an "African solution" to this problem, in the form of yet another mechanism – one for peer review of African states and governments.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) was designed by African leaders as a continent-wide plan that would provide a blueprint from which to develop home grown ideas designed to salvage their countries from decades of debilitating poverty and persistent underdevelopment. It was expected that if all African countries were individually actively engaged in this development effort, the continent would make the necessary leap forward that would facilitate constructive engagement with Western donors. Importantly, NEPAD was based on the understanding that good governance and the rule of law in African states is essential to provide a favorable climate for international investment.[33]

An integral part of NEPAD is thus the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), the purpose of which "… *is to foster the adoption of policies, standards and practices that lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated sub-regional and*

continental economic integration through sharing of experiences and reinforcement of successful and best practice, including identifying deficiencies and assessing the needs of capacity building.[34] NEPAD peer review is envisaged in four areas: political governance (based on adherence to the legally binding commitments contained in the AU Constitutive Act and additional frameworks such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights); economic governance and socio-economic development; corporate governance; and development effectiveness (between Africa and its development partners).

In terms of long-term conflict prevention and early warning, it is the political and governance component of NEPAD peer review that holds most promise. Hunger, poverty, HIV/AIDS and lack of development in Africa are in the first instance political and governance issues. Both economic and corporate governance take their cue from political governance and it is difficult to see how the latter could improve within a corrupt and self-serving political system.[35]

Some work on the political peer review process has already occurred within the AU Commission as part of its CSSDCA Unit (Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa). During the 2002 AU Assembly meeting in Durban, African leaders adopted a memorandum of understanding that set out a framework and process for a CSSDCA/AU peer review process. The Memorandum includes a series of clear undertakings to standards of democracy, human rights and other issues and an agreement by Member States to a comprehensive series of mechanisms for monitoring performance at the continental, sub-regional and national levels. The CSSDCA Unit was thus tasked to elaborate a comprehensive work programme and time schedule for *"... overseeing the monitoring process, with diagnostic tools and measurement criteria for assessing performance, as well as deficiencies and capacity restraints that impede them."*[36]

Within the NEPAD framework, the concept of 'peer' review is extended also to Africa's development partners. At the 5th Summit of the Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee (HSIC) of NEPAD, on 3rd November 2002, the HSIC made the following request: "In the spirit of mutual responsibility and accountability that is embedded in NEPAD, the HSGIC underscored the need for mutual review of development partners in terms of their commitment to Africa. The ECA and OECD should urgently conclude work on the institutional framework for this review."[37] In response to this request, a framework document was prepared by the UNECA, drawing on the on-going work between the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development Secretariats, and considered by the HSIC during its 6th summit in March 2003. The report on an "Institutional Mechanism for Mutual Review of Development Effectiveness between Africa and its Partners" suggests a system of review that will be informed by a set of indicators derived, on the African side, from existing commitments covering peace, security, and political governance; economic and corporate governance; human development; and capacity building. On the side of the external partners, indicators will be based on existing commitments covering: medium–term aid flows; support within local medium–term budgeting and planning frameworks; donor practices; capacity building; and policy coherence, including the status/changes with respect to agricultural subsidies, effective tariff rates, and debt stocks/reductions.[38]

Finally, there has also been an initiative to institute a civil-society based 'peer' review process for sub-Saharan Africa. In anticipation that governmental peer review processes would be very

slow to develop, and that governments may not be keen on identifying their own weaknesses, the Institute for Security Studies launched an "African Human Security Initiative". This is basically a one-year (DFID-funded) project for a core network of seven established African NGOs to embark upon a process of benchmarking the performance of key African governments in respect of human security issues, measured against the commitments taken at the level at OAU/AU heads of state meetings.[39]

While the AU's Peace and Security Council and corresponding mechanisms at the sub-regional level are clearly designed to deal with imminent challenges to peace and security, there is an equally clear linkage between the notion of peer review and the strengthening of national capacities for early conflict prevention. Similarly, a mutual review of development effectiveness may be viewed by both African countries and their development partners through a 'conflict prevention lens.' In short, it appears that the need for conflict prevention in Africa has been widely accepted, and is being addressed through the creation of an elaborate system of new structures and mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

With so much attention being focused on conflict prevention in Africa, it remains surprisingly unclear as to why armed conflict persists, where conflict prevention efforts should start, and where they should stop. Given that poverty, inequality, weak administration, ethnic divisions, etc. are common in most countries, the potential for conflict seems to be imminent virtually everywhere. However, it is not particularly useful to identify every African country as potentially on the verge of war, when many countries clearly are not. If conflict is everywhere, then conflict prevention must target all things, resulting in an unfocused and scattered strategy that loses sight of real opportunities for meaningful preventive activities.

The fact that conflict prevention is also a central pillar of the emergent African security architecture has done little to increase the efficacy of the resulting institutions and mechanisms that are regarded as the African solution to violent conflict. The term 'architecture' is normally used in the context of buildings. It refers to design and structure, rather than functioning and performance. The extant African security architecture – including a wide variety of mechanisms for conflict prevention and management, early warning, and even reviews of governance and development effectiveness - displays a very elaborate design. However, the functioning and performance of these mechanisms seems to be impaired, rather than enhanced by the complexity of an edifice that has been built upon very basic foundations. When cracks appear, in the form of poor performance, the remedy is too often an extra layer of plaster rather than reinforcement of the foundations – the establishment of additional protocols, 'mechanisms', departments, units and cells with inadequate human and financial resources for properly implementing any of the good intentions.

This is not to say that African conflict prevention mechanisms are not deserving of support. Indeed, there is a proven and urgent need for certain components, like the ECOWAS Mission Planning and Management Cell, and these are certainly worthy of urgent and meaningful

support. However, the current proliferation of mechanisms means that there is a lack of focus of resources and effort, with the net result that none of them yet have the capacity to make much difference. While the process of institutionalization of intergovernmental organizations is admittedly a long-term one, Africa's conflict prevention and management needs are immediate and immense. *Ad-hoc* and wavering support to a whole shopping list of ill-defined activities – from civil society empowerment to regional parliaments – will not result in any perceptible improvement in real capacity to deal with the sharp end of conflicts in Africa.

Africa's partners in conflict prevention are therefore faced with the need to make some critical calculations in funding future conflict prevention activities. NEPAD may indeed hold some promise as an Africa-defined repository for channeling funding aimed at national assistance towards removing the structural causes of armed conflict. However, the best 'bang for the buck' would be yielded through a stronger focus on urgent or priority conflict prevention, rather than that which is part and parcel of the broader African development challenge. This would require "early warning" which is accurate, which is heeded, and which leads to the most appropriate and effective regional and international response.

While some progress has been made in developing a wide range of conflict indicators, there is an absence of capacity to demonstrate the actual potential of the presence of such indicators to follow a path of transformation into violence. They key to priority conflict prevention lies in understanding and targeting the dynamic of escalation, feeding such analysis into the process by which decisions are taken that conflict prevention is warranted, and joining it to the mobilization of resources in support of such decisions.[40] While early conflict prevention strategies may usefully be informed by the type of broader "early warning" reports that have hitherto been produced, the bottom line is that effective conflict prevention strategies and actions need to be intelligence-driven.

The United Kingdom, which has established an African Conflict Prevention Pool[41] and deployed Regional Conflict Prevention Advisors, is in a unique position to support, help shape, and plug into the evolving early warning and response systems. If organizations such as the AU and ECOWAS are willing to join forces with civil society institutes[42] in pursuit of more effective and coherent early warning information and analysis, it makes sense to include the UK and other partner countries in such efforts. After all, it has been recognized that there can be no substantial "early action" by African regional mechanisms without the support of such countries – support which would be more readily forthcoming if key partners are involved in the earliest stages of the warning and response process.

ENDNOTES

[1] The author is head of the Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution Department at KAIPTC. This is an edited version of a paper presented to the (UK) Sub-Saharan Africa Policy and Defence Relations Seminar, Accra, 18 January 2005.

[2] UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, *Africa: AU Summit: a Summing Up*, Addis Ababa, 9 July 2004.

[3] Elizabeth Cousens, *Introduction*, in Elizabeth Cousens and Chetan Kumar (eds.) Peacebuilding as Politics: Cultivating Peace in Fragile Societies, Boulder, Colorado, Lynne Rienner, 2001, pp. 1-2.

[4] United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, <u>An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping</u>, A/47/277 - S/24111, 17 June 1992.

[5] *An Agenda for Peace*, op cit, par. 20.

[6] Marrack Goulding, The *Case for an Integrated Approach to Peace and Security*, in Mark Malan (ed.) <u>Resolute Partners: Building Peacekeeping Capacity in Southern Africa</u>, ISS Monograph No 21, February 1998**.**

[7] United Nations, <u>Report of the Secretary-General on the Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa</u>, A/52/871-S/1998/318, par.20.

[8] United Nations, <u>Report of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Armed Conflict</u>, A/55/985-S/2001/574, 7 June 2001.

[9] United Nations, <u>Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations</u>, A/55/305, S/2000/809, 21 August 2000

[10] UN Development Programme, "Conflict Prevention and Peace Building", http://www.undp.org/bcpr/conflict_prevention/index.htm

[11] Michi Ebata, <u>From the Discourse to the Ground: UNDP Activities in Conflict Prevention</u>, UNDP (Bureau for Crisis prevention and Recovery), New York, May 2003, p. 9.

[12] International Peace Academy, <u>Peacekeeper's Handbook</u>, Pergamon, New York, 1984, p.7.

[13] Michael Doyle, <u>Peacebuilding in Cambodia</u>, IPA Policy Briefing Series, December 1996, p. 3.

[14] Ibid.

[15] *An Agenda for Peace*, op. cit. par. 59.

[16] Ibid, par. 55

[17] In West Africa for example, the ECOWAS Declaration of Political Principles in 1991 set out member states' commitment to uphold human rights, democracy and the rule of law. This was taken further in December 2001, with declarations on Child Rights and Human Trafficking, and most importantly, the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, which addresses root causes of conflict, such as corruption and instability. This is a supplementary protocol to the Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, Peace and Security, which deals with issues such as free and fair elections, civilian control of the military and unconstitutional changes of government.

[18] Necla Tschirgi, <u>Peacebuilding as the Link between Security and Development: Is the Window of Opportunity Closing?</u> IPA Sudies in Security and Development, New York, December 2003, p. 2.

[19] United Nations, <u>A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility: Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change</u>, A/59/565, 02 December 2004, par. 261.

[20] Ibid, par. 263-264.

[21] Michi Ebata, op cit, pp. 17-18.

[22] United Nations Development Programme, Agenda 21 (Chapter 37, UNCED, 1992.)

[23] Mvemba Phezo Dizolele, *Eye on Africa: Mali's democracy*, UPI Africa, 20 December 2004 http://www.wpherald.com/Africa/storyview.php?StoryID=20041220-112734-1281r

[24] Progress report of HE Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Chairperson of the NEPAD Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee (HSIC) to the Second Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, Assembly/AU/Rpt (ll), p 2.

[25] The eight other Commissioners are responsible for the following departments: Peace and Security; Political Affairs; Infrastructure and Energy; Social Affairs; Human Resources, Science and Technology; Trade and Industry; Rural Economy and Agriculture; and Economic Affairs.

[26] Protocol relating to the Establishment of the AU Peace and Security Council, 9 July 2002, Article 2(1). Hereafter referred to as "the PSC Protocol".

[27] The Inter-Governmental Developmental Authority (IGAD) in the East; the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the West; the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) in the North; the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in the South; and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) in the Central African sub-region. The Institute for Security Studies provides a ready on-line reference to each organisation (its purpose, structure, key instruments and documents, etc.) This can be viewed at www.iss.org.za

[28] Institute for Security Studies, Non-Paper on the Operationalization of the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), November 2004. www.iss.org.za

[29] There have been a few exceptions to reliance on consent. For example, ECWOWAS intervention in Liberia in 1990 and SADC intervention in Lesotho in 1998.

[30] The meeting was attended by Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and ROC. Rwanda, Burundi and Sao Tome and Principe were not represented. UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, Central Africa: New Regional Security Mechanism, 20 December 2004 http://allafrica.com/stories/200412200248.html

[31] Only $1.6 million has been paid into the Peace Fund by member states.

[32] UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, Africa: AU Summit: a Summing Up, Addis Ababa, 9 July 2004.

[33] Jakkie Cilliers, NEPAD African Peer Review Mechanism, ISS Paper No 64, November 2002.

[34] African Peer Review Mechanism (AHG/235(XXXVIII) Annex 2.

[35] Jakkie Cilliers, Peace and Security through Good Governance? A guide to the NEPAD African Peer Review Mechanism, ISS Paper, No 70, April 2003.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Par 20 of the communiqué of 5th Summit of the Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee, 3 November 2002.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Further detail on the project, and output to date can be viewed at www.africanreview.org/

[40] At a practical level, it has been suggested that primary resource for the provision of this kind of understanding and analysis within the AU's Early Warning System (EWS) should be a team of highly qualified and competent analysts – three for each of the five sub-regions. With a total staff complement of 21 in Addis Ababa, including a head and deputy head, it is estimated that a viable EWS would cost less than US$1 million to establish, and about $1 million a year to run. For an elaboratin of this proposal, including a staffing table and detailed organizational structure, see Institute for Security Studies, *Non-Paper on the Operationalization of the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS)*, November 2004. www.iss.org.za

[41] The UK African Peacekeeping Training Support Programme, initiated in 1996, was subsumed in 2001 into a much larger, multidimensional Conflict Prevention Pool (CPP). Under this initiative, the Foreign and commonwealth Office (FCO), the Ministry of Defence (MOD), and the Department for International Development (DFID) pooled their funding for projects promoting conflict prevention. This money is apportioned to two funds; the Global Pool (chaired by the FCO) and the Africa Pool (chaired by DFID).

[42] In this regard, the ECOWAS EWS is indeed working closely with the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), but both organisations lack adequate human and financial resources for the full

implementation of a working EWS. In the international non-governmental realm, there are a few capable organizations –such as the International Crisis Group – that provide both timely reports on evolving conflict situations and recommendations for action.