Peace & Security Council Report

Why African citizens were shocked by the pictures from Sochi

> Images of African officials in Russia testing and gazing at sophisticated weapons, with visible exhilaration, have been circulating online. This was happening on the margins of the Russia–Africa Summit held in Sochi on 23–24 October 2019.

Even though countries have the sovereign right to buy arms for national defence purposes, the pictures raise several legitimate concerns. These centre on the implications of bringing more arms to a continent already awash with weapons, caught in the grip of armed violence and instability in many of its regions, and that is trying to 'silence the guns' by 2020.

It also brings into question Africa's priorities. Should arms sales play such an important part in Africa's relations with Russia and its other partners across the world, if at all?

> Should arms sales play such an important part in Africa's relations with Russia and its other partners across the world?

Clearly, there is a need for greater continental action when it comes to arms control and management. There is also a need for transparency in the decision-making process on military expenditure, particularly the process through which national governments decide to purchase weapons.

Arms sales and militarism in the world and in Africa

Historically, the so-called military-industrial complex – military contractors and lobbyists said to be perpetuating conflict – consolidated in the late 20th century in the United States (US) and the West more generally. It has since supplied arms the world over, legally and illegally.

In 1961 US president Dwight Eisenhower warned of the increasing power of the military-industrial complex and said that it was escaping the government and the public's control. Since then Russia, China and other smaller countries have joined the list of advanced arms producers.

It is evident that the weapons industry is big business. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), global military expenditure in 2018 was estimated at US$1 822 billion, with the US accounting for 60% (US$649 billion) of this, followed by China, Saudi Arabia, India and France. Military expenditure in Africa stood at around US$40.2 billion in 2018, with North Africa spending US$22.2 billion and sub-Saharan Africa US$18.8 billion.

These figures – and the number of arms in circulation on the continent – may be grossly understated, given the prominence of arms trafficking in Africa, which also feeds global and regional criminal networks. This spending on arms, the full extent of which is unknown, contrasts with the persistent poverty in and fragility of many countries on the continent, coupled with expanding human security challenges.

Compounding this is the fact that the military is at the heart of the conception of the modern state. This is why the practice globally has been to ensure that the military is placed under civilian control. However, in Africa power is often deeply entrenched in the military or the military is the most dominant – if not the sole viable – political actor. In some countries it can be argued that the military is a state within the state.

> This spending on arms contrasts with the persistent poverty in and fragility of many countries on the continent

This is exacerbated by the dominant 'securitism' paradigm, which approaches security from a purely militaristic or police perspective, leading to ill-adapted responses to Africa's main challenges.

Africa's arms and (in)security landscape

From 2014–2018 the top arms suppliers to the continent included Russia, China, Ukraine, Germany and France, while the biggest recipients/buyers of arms in Africa were Egypt, Algeria and Morocco, according to the SIPRI study.

While most of the weapons in Africa are imported, 22 African countries manufacture different kinds of small arms and light weapons (SALW). These include some current members of the Peace and Security Council, namely Algeria, Angola, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. Artisanal production of arms is also prevalent on the continent, with those weapons reported to fuel criminality in many countries.

The proliferation of SALW is an important contributing factor to conflict in Africa. An Oxfam study shows that there is an estimated 100 million uncontrolled SALW in circulation on the continent, mainly concentrated in crisis and fragile areas, fuelling conflict and causing countries to remain trapped in a cycle of armed violence.

Meanwhile, the manufacturing of military equipment in Africa is not always done by local companies. Examples include South African companies manufacturing arms in Kenya, a Russian company in Egypt, and a German and an Emirati (UAE) company in Algeria.

Lack of oversight

The question of oversight and transparency in the management of armed and security forces also arises. This includes, for example, strategic decisions on

US$40.2 billion

AFRICA'S MILITARY
EXPENDITURE IN 2018

the merits of what appears to be the continuous and never-ending purchase of armaments or the often-disproportionate budgets allocated to the defence sector in several African countries.

Linked to that is the question of the management of national arms stocks, which run the risk of being diverted and ending up in the hands of armed groups or bandits. Armed groups and criminals already benefit from arms trafficking, and at times from the misplacement of peacekeeping missions' arms stocks. The other category of actor escaping public oversight is foreign military bases and soldiers on the continent. Their presence and the nature of their activities (including the kind and amount of equipment they have) are difficult to track.

Disappointingly, oftentimes security sector reform (SSR) policies aimed at democratising security institutions are poorly implemented, if at all, and fail to address the issue of security sector oversight.

> The continent is facing enormous socio-economic challenges that the procurement of more arms will not resolve

The lack of democratic oversight of the security sector is intrinsically linked to the general lack of transparent governance in many countries, especially in situations where the military has been central to state formation. State institutions that are meant to take up this task, such as national parliaments, tend to play a mere rubber-stamping role to decisions made by the executive branch.

All of the above explains, in large part, the strong reactions observed on the continent at the sight of African officials admiring Russian arms in Sochi. The fact is that the continent is facing enormous socio-economic challenges that the procurement of more arms will not resolve.

Need for continental action

It is far easier for Africa to manage the legal purchase of arms than their illegal trafficking and flows on the continent, which is much harder to curtail. African countries can manage the purchase of legal SALW without compromising their national military security priorities. This begins with assessing the actual need for additional purchases, which obviously entails democratising the management of security institutions.

It is also necessary to reflect on the scrutiny and transparency of activities conducted by foreign military bases and soldiers operating on the continent.

Finally, along with properly implementing SSR policies and democratic oversight of the security sector, Africa could increasingly benefit from a continental moratorium similar to the ECOWAS Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Light Weapons. This could serve as a model for similar initiatives on a continental level.

100 million

UNCONTROLLED SMALL ARMS IN AFRICA

Negotiations to end all wars in Sudan

The transitional government of Sudan started peace talks in September 2019 with armed groups in parts of the country with longstanding conflicts, particularly in the Blue Nile, South Kordofan and Darfur.

The African Union (AU), which was instrumental in mediating between the Transitional Military Council (TMC) and civilians following the removal of then president Omar al-Bashir earlier this year, should continue to play a critical role in the peace process. It has a role as both mediator and guarantor of the agreement that will emerge from current negotiations.

According to the three-year power-sharing deal signed in August 2019, the transitional government has six months to complete peace agreements with all armed groups in Sudan.

The September peace talks were hosted by South Sudanese President Salva Kiir in Juba and resulted in a declaration aimed at building confidence among negotiating parties. The so-called Juba Declaration also provided a framework for further negotiations.

The declaration revoked criminal charges and lifted travel bans imposed by al-Bashir against several leaders of armed groups. It also bound signatories to a ceasefire and the exchange of prisoners. Armed groups in turn agreed to create a 'humanitarian corridor' for the distribution of aid.

> The transitional government has six months to complete peace agreements with all armed groups

Further talks in October between rebels and the transitional government identified core issues for negotiation, which will be discussed when negotiations are expected to resume in mid or late November.

Who will lead the mediation?

A successful peace agreement with armed groups in Sudan has the potential to provide a roadmap for subsequent peacebuilding and state-building processes in the country. If this is to be achieved, continued commitment to the peace process by all stakeholders is critical.

As part of its mediation role, the AU has been asked by the signatories of the Juba Declaration to 'issue a new mandate on Sudan peace negotiations'. The Peace and Security Council (PSC) at a meeting on 10 October subsequently asked the AU Commission's chairperson to submit a proposal in this regard as soon as possible. The proposal should clarify who will lead the mediation process, and detail the technical support the AU will provide to the peace process going forward.

The lead mediator should make confidence building a priority to overcome mistrust among conflicting parties, which might impede negotiations. The PSC should closely follow up on the peace process, with regular briefings from the AU's lead mediator.

Agenda items up for discussion

Among the issues that armed groups have tabled for negotiation is how to address the root causes of the conflict. These include political and socio-economic marginalisation, lack of freedom and justice, hegemony of the centre over the country's peripheral areas, and the failure to manage ethnic and religious diversity.

The second major issue tabled for discussion is a power-sharing arrangement. The transitional government has postponed the creation of the Transitional Legislative Council and the appointment of state authorities in a bid to include armed groups in the formation of these state structures.

Armed groups are expected to call for the reconfiguration of the cabinet, with three positions allotted to appointees from the peripheries, their inclusion in council positions and their nomination for governorship positions in their respective regions.

The third issue for discussion is the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of all armed groups, including paramilitary forces such as the Janjaweed militias and the Rapid Support Forces. Negotiations will also address security sector reform (SSR) and the creation of a united, professional army.

Armed groups expect the SSR process to disband the National Intelligence and Security Service and reintegrate their soldiers. Rightsizing the army, civil–military relations and democratic oversight are additional issues to be agreed upon.

Economic provisions are also tabled for negotiation. Notably, the equitable sharing of revenues from the extraction of natural resources such as gold, uranium, iron ore, copper and petroleum, which are found in high deposits in Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan, will be negotiated.

> A number of opportunities for peace emerged during the uprising that ousted al-Bashir from office

The peace talks are also expected to address the administration of transitional justice in accordance with the Draft Constitutional Charter. A number of armed groups have demanded that al-Bashir and others accused of crimes against humanity be handed over to the International Criminal Court, and an independent investigation be conducted into the 3 June attacks on protesters.

Opportunities for peace

A number of opportunities for peace emerged during the uprising that ousted al-Bashir from office.

A key opportunity is that the civilian resistance forces, currently part of the transitional government, and armed groups began to cooperate during the uprising. This created a working relationship that has allowed them to meet for negotiations despite reservations on the part of armed groups on the provisions of the Transitional Constitutional Declaration, and civilians on the Juba Declaration.

Another opportunity for peace is the current process of negotiation and peacemaking between armed groups that have in the past undermined and at times fought each other.

The major political changes in Sudan have made the conflict 'ripe' for negotiations. Currently, there is substantial pressure from within and outside Sudan on armed groups to end the conflict. If they fail to do so, they risk losing political legitimacy and face additional punitive sanctions from the AU.

The PSC has warned that it will impose sanctions against spoilers and those who fail to take part in the peace process.

Immediate threats to peace

The current peace process faces numerous challenges, which will emerge as negotiations continue. The most immediate challenge is

September
2019

SUDAN STARTS NEW
PEACE TALKS

the lack of trust among major stakeholders, who do not believe their counterparts are negotiating in good faith.

A number of rebel groups have accused the transitional government of being dominated by the military they have been fighting against for decades. Thus, they are not convinced that the current peace process is any different from a number of previous agreements that they say the al-Bashir government failed to implement.

There is also deep-seated mistrust within and between armed groups. Historically, armed groups and coalitions have split, and splinter groups have signed separate deals with the government.

In addition, there is apprehension among civilians that armed groups may not be pursuing peace as a primary objective. Civilians fear armed groups will drag the peace process out in a bid to maximise their narrow political and economic gains.

Lack of trust at this stage of negotiations has the potential to hinder consensus building on substantive issues that should be addressed through the peace process.

Confidence-building measures should be inclusive

Peace talks are expected to resume in November with almost all of the signatories of the Juba Declaration expected to participate.

> There is apprehension among civilians that armed groups may not be pursuing peace as a primary objective

Armed groups that signed the declaration include the Sudan People's Liberation Movement – North (SPLM-N) led by Malik Agar from Blue Nile; SPLM-North, led by Abdelaziz El-Hilu from South Kordofan; the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM); the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM), led by Minni Minawi; the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM), led by Abdelwahid Nur from Darfur; the Kush Liberation Movement (KLM); the Beja Congress; and the United People's Front for Liberation and Justice (UPFLJ), from eastern Sudan.

Before and during the next phase of the peace talks, AU mediators should undertake confidence-building measures that address the immediate challenge the peace process is facing, namely the lack of trust between conflicting parties.

Confidence-building measures will help conflicting parties to make political concessions and advance the process to address the root causes of the conflict. In addition to political elites, confidence building should also be inclusive of wider constituencies.

Gold
Copper
Uranium
Iron ore
Petroleum

FOUND IN THE
DISPUTED AREAS

New threats to peace in Mozambique

Leaders from across Southern and Central Africa, as well as AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat, travelled to Maputo, Mozambique in early August 2019 to act as guarantors for the peace agreement between the Mozambican government and former rebel group RENAMO.

The agreement paved the way for inclusive elections in mid-October, which provided for a decentralised political system – one of RENAMO's key demands since it returned to armed conflict over five years ago.

Mahamat said in a statement that Mozambique could be assured of 'the AU's continued commitment to support the peace process as well as the government's efforts towards achieving sustainable socio-economic development in the country'. So far the AU has taken a back seat, with negotiations largely being led by internal processes.

Following elections on 15 October, won by the ruling FRELIMO with an overwhelming majority, fears have been mounting over the sustainability of the accord. Allegations of vote rigging, within the context of huge losses for the opposition, including in its provincial strongholds, now place the agreement in jeopardy.

The international community and especially the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the AU have an important role to play in supporting peace in the country.

A reversal of the gains made through years of dialogue between RENAMO and the ruling party in Mozambique will be a setback for the continent's Roadmap to Silencing the Guns. Mozambique is already plagued by violence in the north of the country, which has yet to be placed on the continental agenda.

Accusations of fraud during elections

Following their announcement, RENAMO and the MDM, the third-largest party in the country, rejected the results of the October presidential, provincial and legislative elections. RENAMO then lodged a complaint with the Constitutional Council, demanding that the results of the elections be annulled and a rerun organised. The council, however, rejected the complaint on 11 November.

According to the results, incumbent President Filipe Nyusi won 73% of the votes, RENAMO leader Ossufo

Momade 22% and MDM leader Daviz Simango a mere 4%. FRELIMO also won all the provincial assemblies in the country's 10 provinces. This was a surprising turnaround, given RENAMO's majority in three provinces in the last elections in 2014. Losing in places where it has always been popular based on historical and ethnic loyalties is a huge blow to RENAMO.

The October 2015 election is also a major departure from the trend seen in local elections in October 2018, when FRELIMO managed to get only 51% of the total votes. By contrast, last month it even managed to clinch a majority in legislative polls in the country's second largest city Beira, which has traditionally always gone to RENAMO and since 2009 to the RENAMO breakaway, the MDM.

FRELIMO increased its majority in Parliament to two-thirds of the vote, while RENAMO's seats dropped from 89 to 60.

> This was a surprising turnaround, given RENAMO's majority in three provinces in the last elections in 2014

In their announcements following the results, the two opposition parties claimed there had been large-scale manipulation of the registration process, with voters' numbers deliberately increased in FRELIMO strongholds, intimidation and violence in the run-up to the election day, and irregularities in the tabulation of the votes.

The fact that thousands of independent election observers were denied the opportunity to do their jobs because of the national electoral commission's failure to provide timely accreditation was also cited as a flaw in the process.

The electoral commission was divided over the outcome, with eight of the 17 members of the commission rejecting the results. This division was largely along party lines, but shows the strong views by many in the electoral management body that the voting process was not

free and fair. The commission is composed of parties proportional to their representation in Parliament.

Observers note flaws in the process

AU and SADC election observers, in their preliminary statements, noted the violence in the run-up to the elections – notably the assassination of an election observer in Gaza province, allegedly by police – the abuse of incumbency and the alleged anomalies in the voter registration process. Yet they declared the election process peaceful and well managed.

European Union (EU) and United States observers were more critical, noting attacks on opposition candidates and the exclusion of independent observers.

RENAMO divided

RENAMO's new leader Momade, who took over from his predecessor Afonso Dhlakama in early 2018, has not managed to unite the party behind him. Infighting marked the run-up to the elections. In addition, the 6 August peace deal was rejected by a group calling themselves the RENAMO Military Junta. The Junta has claimed responsibility for a number of attacks on government soldiers in the central parts of the country, similar to those stages by RENAMO between 2013 and 2016.

RENAMO's weak performance in the polls now strengthens the hand of the breakaway group.

Mozambique's many challenges

The threat of the peace agreement's unravelling comes against the backdrop of serious insecurity in the north of Mozambique. Since November 2017 violent extremists have carried out brutal attacks on villagers in the Cabo Delgado province, with some of them claiming to be radical Islamists.

The government has deployed the military and has reportedly received support from Russian mercenaries, but the insurgency continues to grow. Citizens of Cabo Delgado were prevented from voting in several districts owing to the insecurity.

The Mozambican government, however, is keeping an eye on the prize, with billions of dollars in revenue expected thanks to the liquefied natural gas finds in Cabo Delgado province. Some commentators believe the insurgency in Cabo Delgado is directly linked to this expected boom.

Support for the implementation of the deal

In order for Mozambique to make the most of its natural resources and the expected economic activity resulting from it, political stability will be key. The international community has shown through its commitment to the peace process that it is willing to support the country to realise this long-awaited goal.

The EU's Commissioner for Political Affairs, Federica Mogherini, was at the signing ceremony in Maputo and pledged €60 million for the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of RENAMO soldiers. If RENAMO stays in the peace agreement and accepts the election results, this process could move forward rapidly. Around 5 000 soldiers are said to be part of the RENAMO contingent yet to be demobilised.

One of the main sticking points for RENAMO has been the alleged unwillingness of the government to allocate top positions in the military and security services to former RENAMO soldiers.

> The August deal was largely the result of closed-door mediation by a small group of individuals

To appease RENAMO after its big loss in the elections, some are suggesting that Nyusi offer key government positions to the opposition or enter into fresh negotiations with Momade. This seems unlikely, but ensuring the success of the DDR process, as set out in the peace agreement, could be an important step to ensure the peace deal survives the elections.

Behind the scenes, the guarantors of the deal, the AU, SADC and the rest of the international community can support measures that will ensure the longevity of the peace agreement; the third since the end of Mozambique's civil war in 1992. This includes mediation and support to the DDR process.

The August deal was largely the result of closed-door mediation by a small group of individuals, led by the Swiss ambassador in Mozambique. International and multilateral pressure from the AU and SADC on the parties to adhere to the agreement will, however, be necessary if the deal starts falling apart in the coming weeks and months.

Africa's free trade initiative could bolster continental peace

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the world's largest trading block by virtue of the number of states signed onto it, is set to start trading in July 2020. The AfCFTA took three years to negotiate – considered a very short period for such a complex undertaking. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) says this speedy conclusion demonstrates the 'appetite and commitment' of all parties.

However, despite the remarkable progress made so far and the potential of the AfCFTA to contribute to economic development and peace, its implementation is bound to be hampered by the prevailing insecurity on the continent. If the situation continues to worsen and spreads, as is currently seen in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin, the full potential of the AfCFTA will not be achieved.

An arc of instability

Africa has made progress in the quest for peace and security by strengthening continental response frameworks and institutions. Significant strides have also been made in difficult cases such as Somalia and Sudan.

However, recent developments in Libya, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and the Lake Chad Basin, as well as the violent extremism trends in the Sahel, point to structural challenges in addressing the continent's insecurity situation.

> Africa's peace and security outlook remains deeply concerning despite enormous progress over time

Despite the overall progress, therefore, Africa's current security outlook is marked by the blurring of lines between conflicts and violent extremism, as well as the spread of the resulting insecurity from the Sahel towards the coastal areas.

It is also characterised by the protraction of existing conflicts and, most importantly, the emergence of areas along the equator as a soft underbelly of insecurity where the multiple drivers of state fragility on the continent are compounded. This belt constitutes an arc of

instability that threatens to widen both northwards and southwards, if not addressed.

Africa's peace and security outlook, in this context, thus remains deeply concerning despite enormous progress over time.

Socio-economic challenges, marginalisation and governance deficits are evident drivers of insecurity on the continent, particularly in the peripheral areas of African states. The lack of economic opportunities has made it easier for extremist groups to recruit young people. Poverty and unemployment have become both the drivers and the consequences of insecurity in Africa.

This implies that significant progress can be made in the area of peace and security if the current socio-economic situation in many parts of the continent can be overturned. This is a key area where the AfCFTA interfaces with Africa's security challenges.

The promise of the AfCFTA

According to UNECA, the AfCFTA will boost intra-African trade by up to about US$35 billion and lead to a drop of about US$10 billion in imports by 2022. This is expected to turn the continent into a US$3 trillion economic bloc of 1.2 billion people.

As noted by the president of the African Development Bank, Akinwumi Adesina, this level of economic activity promises to unlock enormous benefits and wealth for Africa's 55 states. Such an outcome will inevitably have an enormous impact on continental peace and security realities in several major ways.

First, greater economic opportunities promise to impact insecurity significantly by helping to prevent the onset of violence in stable countries and offering pathways for countries currently insecure to exit conflicts. Apart from emptying the streets of many

idle hands, it will resource African states and enhance their abilities to manage the governance deficit issues currently bedevilling them.

A prosperous Africa is the biggest panacea to the continent's migration crisis and the only means to enhance continental capacity for robust action against insecurity. The AfCFTA is thus not just a giant step to create wealth but also a major step towards eradicating Africa's insecurity challenges.

In addition, the AfCFTA is a crucial move forwards in safeguarding the future of African states. It is evident from the recent trends of popular mass uprisings in Africa that citizens are increasingly opposed to states that cannot provide basic services such as healthcare, education and security. The African state's lack of relevance in the daily lives of citizens is thus in and of itself a major threat to stability and the consolidation of democracy.

Greater economic opportunities promise to impact insecurity significantly by helping to prevent the onset of violence

Providing services to citizens involves good leadership and sustainable economic growth, which the AfCFTA promises. The AfCFTA in this context is thus immediately relevant to state stability.

Against this backdrop, although the AfCFTA may not have been conceptualised as a peace and security response initiative, when fully implemented it will constitute the continent's most ambitious long-term response framework to the structural socio-economic drivers of insecurity.

Threat of insecurity to the free trade area

Yet insecurity is also the biggest obstacle to the realisation of the goals of the AfCFTA. First, the current instability means that the implementation of the initiative will be uneven.

Countries with precarious security situations will not see as much of a boost in economic activities as those that are stable. Although the resulting differences in adoption and implementation are catered for under the 'variable geometry' principle of the agreement, an uneven adoption of the trade area threatens to reduce its overall size and the volume of economic activity.

Particularly disturbing is that insecurity holds the biggest potential to impede the implementation of the initiative by restricting the intra-regional mobility of persons, capital, goods and services. It could also enable organised economic criminals to smuggle cheap goods into the trade area, thereby further weakening the achievement of the intra-African trade agenda.

An uneven adoption of the trade area threatens to reduce its overall size and the volume of economic activity

The closure of Nigeria's land borders to trade – reportedly as a result of smuggling activities – shows that such a situation will affect states' involvement in the free trade area. Ultimately, insecurity in Africa has a major impact on overall progress to other milestones in the continental economic integration agenda.

Need for political will

Unfortunately, Africa's security outlook is not likely to change significantly by July 2020. The current insecurity realities are therefore the context within which stakeholders in the AfCFTA must implement the initiative. There are many risks ahead.

The excitement that has come with the AfCFTA should thus inform realistic calls and continental action for pragmatic progress on the peace and security front, as a prerequisite for realising the goals of the free trade area.

This is important because the relationship between the implementation of the free trade area and insecurity is inverse. More insecurity jeopardises the implementation of the AfCFTA, while a successful trade area will improve peace and security. The AfCFTA is, therefore, not just a wealth creation initiative but also arguably Africa's most significant move towards meeting the peace and security aspirations of Agenda 2063.

It is important that AU member states consider the initiative as part of their structural response to insecurity on the continent and show the needed political will to make it happen.

No accessible meeting records: the unusual practice of the PSC

The PSC is the highest decision-making body of the AU on peace and security between summits of heads of state. It has met close to 900 times since its inception in 2004. Yet, while the PSC has issued communiqués or press statements on most of its meetings, it has kept neither verbatim records nor official minutes of its meetings in a consistent manner.

Although it appears that some PSC (and AU) meetings are audio-recorded, they are not transcribed. There also does not seem to be clarity as to how these recordings are stored or managed. In contrast, the United Nations (UN) Security Council, on which the PSC was modelled, keeps either minutes or verbatim records of all its meetings.

Most PSC meetings on important peace and security issues take place in closed sessions that are typically restricted to the 15 PSC members. AU Commission officials, partner organisations or individuals may also be invited to brief the PSC. Often, invited partners are required to leave meetings after giving their input. The PSC also holds a small number of open sessions attended by non-members, partners and others.

> The AU Commission should be trusted by member states to have the technical capacity to keep confidential information safe

The fact that after 15 years there are no official written records of PSC meetings – and that member states' access to the audio recordings is unclear – creates problems for the institution and the continent as a whole. This is in terms of continuity in its work, the existence and maintenance of institutional memory, and the need to archive the history of the continent's nerve centre for peace and security decision-making.

Possible reasons for the absence of PSC verbatim records

There are many reasons why the PSC may have decided against producing official, written, verbatim records of every meeting.

Historically, the AU, and before it the Organization of African Unity (OAU), has shown an aversion to scrutiny. This tendency is shared by member states themselves. This was even more pronounced in the earlier years of the PSC, as the AU was still transitioning from the OAU and was reluctant to invite scrutiny of its discussions and decisions.

900

MEETINGS SO FAR
HELD BY THE PSC

Some have argued that not keeping verbatim records of meetings is the PSC's attempt to prevent information from leaking and, thus, a way of keeping sensitive information classified. However, it is obvious that in order to classify information, one must possess it in the first place. Also, the AU Commission should in that case be trusted by member states to have the technical capacity to keep confidential information safe.

Insiders believe that some member states do not want scrutiny of their foreign policy choices or lack thereof, particularly their positions on sensitive issues. A PSC communiqué emanating from a meeting for which no accessible written verbatim record exists prevents non-PSC members from deducing the position of individual PSC members. It also prevents the naming and shaming of member states that have over time changed their positions on various issues or lacked clarity of policy.

> It is difficult for new members to track the nature or continuity of the foreign policy positions of various countries

In addition, it prevents the emergence of undue tensions among AU member states, as well as between AU member states and non-AU member states, that might originate from the nature of discussions and the positions of PSC member states during these discussions.

Problems with PSC's 'off the record' meetings

Despite these justifications, this situation creates several serious problems.

First, it is difficult for new members to track the nature or continuity of the foreign policy positions of various countries. It is also difficult for African citizens to understand the nature of continental decision-making, the PSC's appreciation of the challenges on the continent, and the maintenance of continuity in continental policy-making over time.

While communiqués and press statements reflect the PSC's common position on a particular issue, they are only a fraction of what can gathered from PSC discussions. For instance, they do not say how the PSC arrived at a particular conclusion and how that should inform subsequent discussions and decisions.

The nature, substance and level of engagement are completely left out when meetings are not recorded verbatim. For many new member states this can prove problematic when, for instance, the PSC has to decide on a procedural matter that a record of its past practices (which would have become customary) could quickly have helped to resolve.

Second, this potentially allows individual countries to flip-flop on decisions. In essence, as long as discussions are not recorded verbatim, PSC

THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL KEEPS MINUTES AND RECORDS OF MEETINGS

members are most likely not going to take responsibility for their contribution or lack thereof to a particular decision. As a result they cannot be held accountable by other AU member states and, ultimately, the African people they represent.

Voting vs consensus in the PSC

In the absence of accessible verbatim meeting records, it is clearly impossible to track voting patterns or even attendance at the PSC.

The Protocol establishing the PSC provides that 'each Member of the Peace and Security Council shall have one vote' and 'decisions of the Peace and Security Council shall generally be guided by the principle of consensus'. Furthermore, if 'consensus cannot be reached, the Peace and Security Council shall adopt its decisions on procedural matters by a simple majority, while decisions on all other matters shall be made by a two-thirds majority vote of its Members voting'.

> Those with institutional memory of the PSC say it is not clear whether it has ever voted on an issue – it seems the institution has always decided by consensus

Despite this provision, those with institutional memory of the PSC say it is not clear whether the institution has ever voted on an issue. Rather, it seems that the institution has always decided by consensus.

In fact, the practice of consensus is not just a PSC principle but an AU 'mantra' – with the exception of voting for the chairperson of the AU Commission and the various commissioners. Consensus as the only modus operandi, however, has its limitations.

One of the obvious challenges is that it may be time consuming. Always seeking consensus can also lead to an inability to resolve anything, especially in situations where voting is needed to arrive at a decisive action. Moreover, consensus can dilute opposite positions and favour a sterile compromise.

Ultimately, when treating the problems of the entire continent, the PSC seems to be doing so largely shielded from any outside scrutiny.

While the PSC does have a mandate to act on its own accord, it is doing so in the interest of the continent and its peoples. Short of providing accessible records to member states and ultimately making these public (depending on the nature of declassification criteria the AU uses), it should at the very least keep classified records of how it is going about its business on behalf of all Africans, for posterity.

This would be helpful for the work of the PSC itself, for its evolution and improvement as an institution and for the accountability of member states to their different constituencies.

AU COMMISSION COULD CLASSIFY CONFIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

PSC Interview: 'Terrorism should not find a physical, economic and moral fertile ground'

Ambassador Ahmedou Ould Abdallah, president of the Centre for Strategy and Security in the Sahel Sahara, former United Nations (UN) Representative for West Africa in Somalia and Burundi and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mauritania, spoke to the *PSC Report* about the security threat in the Sahel region and what can be expected going forward.

What are the major challenges facing the Sahel-Sahara region?

The Sahel-Sahara region is an area I love and know well because this is where I come from. I also served in the region, first as a Mauritanian official, then as a UN Special Representative from 2002 to 2007, and finally now by conducting research and reflecting on the situation.

The challenges of this region – which sits at the juncture of the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa – are many and some are specific to the region. Beyond the neglected issue of the environment, I can mention three challenges.

Currently, the major problem that has been making headlines since 2011 is the security challenge. For many reasons – the effects of contagion and imitation, but also very often bad governance – violent terrorism is increasingly part of the political landscape, of the image of this region that deserves better than to be perceived as a zone of insecurity.

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It is a phenomenon that is now present in the Sahel after having been particularly prevalent in some countries of the Maghreb. Today, it covers almost the entire Sahelian band, from east to west and from north to south. What is more, according to the analyses that we have and the observations made by some knowledgeable people, terrorism is heading to – not to say that it is already raging in – the perimeter of the Gulf of Guinea, which is the entire Atlantic coast of West Africa and the Sahel.

The security challenge has a very high cost for governments. It depletes their revenues and increases their non-productive expenditures. This represents a significant shortfall, especially in tourism, which was a source of income and opened up several regions in the northern parts of beautiful countries such as Chad, Niger, Mali, a part of eastern Mauritania, and southern Algeria.

In addition to the security challenge, there is another one that I identified in 2006 with my UN colleagues in our Dakar office. This is the challenge of

Chad
Mali
Niger
Mauritania
Algeria

LOSING POTENTIAL TOURISTS

youth unemployment. At the time, we asked ourselves how one could ensure a better future for young people who are increasingly connected and less attached to ethnic categorisations. How, beyond creating jobs, can we truly prepare a credible future for those young people? This challenge still persists today and represents a threat to national cohesion in several countries.

A third challenge that I looked at and that I still consider worrying is that of rapid urbanisation. Even if rapid urbanisation can be an advantage because it invites and encourages national cohesion, diversity and exchanges between citizens of the same country coming from different regions, ethnic groups and sensitivities, our big cities are also severely affected by the difficult problems of communication, transport, unemployment and insecurity, which characterise major urban areas.

It is also important to remember that the region, beyond desertification and recurrent droughts, faces enormous environmental challenges that are often related to those of the city, namely the issues of urbanisation and public sanitation. In some countries, the Atlantic coast has a high population density and has become very vulnerable. Towns and populations are under threat.

> We asked ourselves how one could ensure a better future for young people who are increasingly connected

In sum, the region faces several challenges: insecurity, youth unemployment and environment. National governments have to increase efforts to deal with their vulnerabilities. Terrorism should not find a physical, economic and moral fertile ground in affected countries. Although terrorism exists the world over, its effects may be more destructive and enduring in the Sahel.

How do governments of the region, and by extension subregional organisations or mechanisms, address the issues you mention above? What, in your opinion, are the possible solutions to these challenges?

It is not right to blame current governments for the insecurity that is taking root in the region. Having said that, the problems of a growing youth population without avenues and rapid urbanisation do not appear to be systematically treated, as they should be. The first Africa–Europe Summit, which had as a theme youth unemployment, was held in November 2018 in Abidjan. Today, there should be a follow-up to this meeting. Youth unemployment and urbanisation are still matters of urgent and great concern.

With regard to terrorism and violent extremism, each country has its own methods of managing the threat. However, given the proximity, at least geographically, of terrorists to populations, and given that terrorism itself is regional or even universal, it is necessary, in the absence of a magical

RAPID URBANISATION IS
A THREAT TO STABILITY

solution, to take an approach that addresses its root causes, as well as the factors that promote their sustainability and unhindered regional expansion.

In terms of solutions, an effort has to be made to strengthen the national unity of affected countries. Politically, we need to broaden the base of governments, i.e. have more inclusive governments. Even democratically elected governments need to open up to civil society and especially to their political oppositions. In a period of crisis, it is in fact important to garner all efforts and to put all energies together. This can take the form of national unity governments, or coalition governments, similar to the alliances that terrorist groups create among themselves! It is absolutely necessary to change governance structures and methods.

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Additionally, the military in the Sahel region is composed of elements that are known to be heroic and strongly resilient in a difficult environment of hunger and thirst. They are very courageous soldiers. If today they do not manage to successfully combat the terrorists, it is firstly because the enemy is elusive, but there is also a fundamental problem: that of the management of national resources, including those allocated to the armed forces.

This management must be made more transparent. Recruitment must be more open. Budgets, including soldiers' salaries and pensions, must be computerised. In an era of generalised digitalisation, the notion of 'secret defence' (state secrets or classified information) becomes more and more difficult to justify. This 'secret defence' opens the door to suspicion and accusations of all kinds of corruption, and negatively affects the morale of troops.

Therefore, what are potential solutions? Strengthening national unity and social cohesion, professionalising the military and ensuring transparency in its management, as well as better relationships with foreign partners.

In this regard, all parties – governments of the Sahel and external partners – have to play fair. One cannot seek an international presence, be it bilateral or multilateral, and at the same time mobilise local populations against those partners that allegedly 'are perpetuating war'!

How do you evaluate, so far, the impact of initiatives such as the G5 Sahel and the Multi-National Joint Task Force against Boko Haram? What has been the real added value of these initiatives?

I sincerely believe that, without external intervention by France in Mali in 2013, the situation in that country would have been very different to what it is at present. Today, what is important not to ignore is the severity of the security crisis. Now firmly implanted in the region, this crisis is affecting and endangering national and regional economies and threatening the cohesion
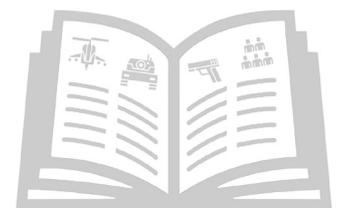
MILITARY BUDGETS
SHOULD BE
MORE TRANSPARENT

of affected states. This can be seen now with the continuation of inter-ethnic violence, sometimes not linked to terrorists. They feed on the insecurity created by terrorists.

It is now seven years that the crisis in the Sahel persists. It is, without a doubt, time for the governments of the Sahel and their partners to take stock of the situation. The conclusion might be to end the insecurity, not with speeches but by increasing the means to successfully respond to adversaries that are determined but not invincible.

Regarding the G5 Sahel, I believe that an institution is good when it is accepted and supported by those who establish it, its member states. The legitimacy of the G5 Sahel is not called into question. The countries that set up the G5 Sahel must continue to support and legitimise organisations among their populations and their external partners.

> We should provide the G5 Sahel with the resources to do its work and to consider it as an institution not destined to play a prestigious role

The G5 Sahel secretariat is made up of capable people who are dedicated to successfully carrying out the mission entrusted to them. Now it is necessary to provide the G5 Sahel with the resources to do its work and to consider the organisation as an institution not destined to play a prestigious role but meant to accomplish the noble mission of bringing about peace and stability in the region.

In recent months the question of financial resources has come to the forefront. This is normal and important for the operationalisation of any new institution. Naturally, dealing with security issues requires enormous resources. Our governments do not have these resources and partners have their financial constraints and their regulations that are oftentimes too rigorous for the management of crisis situations.

One should add that we do face a problem of method or strategy. Today, there are about 30 000 soldiers in the Sahel region to combat terrorism. This includes about 14 000 UN soldiers, 4 000 to 4 500 French soldiers and more than 1 000 soldiers from other foreign countries. In addition, there are thousands of national troops from the countries of the G5 Sahel.

All those 30 000 soldiers are on the ground to fight less than 1 000 Islamist and other rebel fighters. In the end, the success of the fight in the Sahel must be found in how the response is organised. And as stated earlier, the use of force must come essentially to support political solutions.

Finally, the resolution of the crisis will require strengthening national cohesion and opening up the space to political parties and civil societies, including the business community, as well as ensuring more transparent elections and more justice in the management of public and private business. In summary, avoid blatant conflicts of interest that feed terrorism!

30 000 troops

FIGHTING TERRORISM IN THE SAHEL

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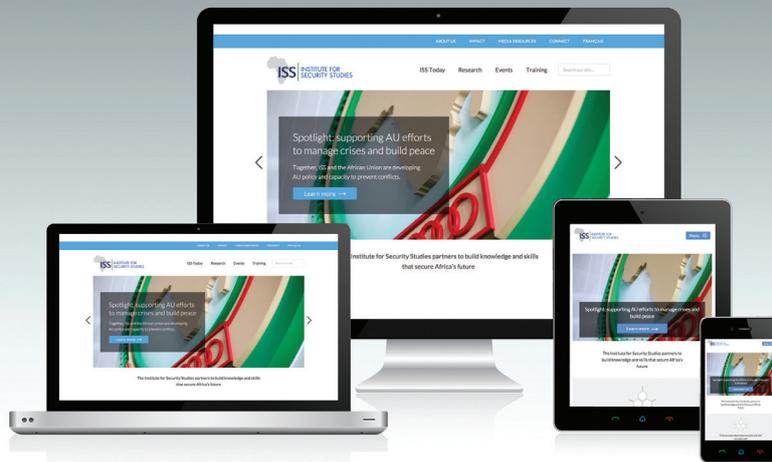
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