



Eight Priorities for the African Union in 2022

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What's new? In the first week of February, the African Union (AU) will hold its annual heads of state summit ahead of its twenty-year anniversary in July. The meeting offers an opportunity for AU member states to assess the organisation's achievements to date as the continent's foremost peace and security body.

Why does it matter? It has been a turbulent year for Africa: tens of thousands killed in wars in the Horn of Africa, countries falling back under military rule, and struggles with faltering transitions and Islamist militancy. The AU's institutions must be able to tackle these problems, as well as climate change-related security threats.

What should be done? The AU should redouble efforts to address crises in the Horn, the Sahel and Mozambique; chart a future for its Somalia mission; press for a successful transition in Chad; and put climate security on the global agenda. This briefing sets out eight priorities for the AU in the coming year.

Overview

July 2022 will mark twenty years since the African Union (AU) officially came into being in Durban, South Africa. A founding principle of the organisation is to promote peace, security and stability on the continent. African leaders built a bespoke architecture that would enable the AU to fulfil this mandate. The organisation's twentieth anniversary offers an opportunity for member states to assess its achievements so far, as well as to examine the AU's role in Africa's evolving peace and security challenges.

The year 2021 was tumultuous in Africa, with coups in Chad, Guinea, Mali and Sudan, an orchestrated power grab in Tunisia, protracted fighting in Ethiopia and a rising threat from transnational Islamist militancy. The AU's response to these crises has been mixed. It has had difficulty acting on two highly pressing conflicts – Ethiopia's civil war and the insurgency in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado region – largely because the governments have resisted what they perceive as external meddling, insisting that their respective crises are domestic affairs. The AU has remained largely a spectator as Libya's political transition risks derailing. Chad and Somalia each rejected the AU's choice of high representative, calling into question whether member states accept its primacy in continental peace and security.

The AU's inconsistent response to the slew of unconstitutional changes of government has been particularly damaging. Often heralded as a major achievement of

its twenty-year history, the AU's established norm against coups took a significant hit when its Peace and Security Council (PSC) decided to maintain Chad's membership after the military took power in April, following the sudden death of the long-time president. Although it swiftly suspended Guinea and Mali following military takeovers in September and May, the Council was deeply divided in trying to articulate a response to the October coup in Khartoum. Some faith in the AU's willingness to uphold this key principle was restored, however, when, after intense deliberations, the PSC decided to suspend Sudan. Most recently, on 24 January 2022, Burkina Faso's military ousted President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, a move which the AU Commission chair swiftly condemned. The country was then suspended by the PSC on 31 January.

The AU has had some wins in the past year. It played a positive role in ensuring that Zambia's election dispute ended in a smooth, peaceful transfer of power. It has continued its strong response to the COVID-19 pandemic, lobbying for equitable access to vaccines and debt relief for particularly vulnerable countries where the economy has slumped because of the outbreak. The coronavirus crisis is far from over: most countries on the continent face worryingly low vaccination rates as underfunded health systems struggle to deliver what vaccines are available to rural areas, while national government messaging has done little to overcome vaccine hesitancy, even among health workers. Still, the AU helped procure nearly 500 million vaccine doses for the continent, with China pledging to supply an additional one billion shots in the coming year.

February's summit will see the chair of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State, the organisation's highest decision-making body, rotate from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Senegal (it changes hands every year). Senegalese President Macky Sall says he will focus on COVID-19 during his time as chair, in particular working to secure access to more shots from abroad and accelerate vaccine manufacturing in Africa. His priorities for peace and security will inevitably be driven by events on the ground, but he will likely need to pay close attention to counter-terrorism, given the spiralling threat of jihadism in the Sahel.

The summit will also see a complete renewal of the PSC, as all fifteen members will soon reach the end of their two- or three-year terms. The outcome of the council elections will influence the AU's direction, in particular around contentious issues like unconstitutional changes of government, at a time when the continent faces many urgent crises. Aside from the conflicts and crises already in train, several elections will require the AU's attention in the course of 2022, including Kenya's highly charged presidential contest, delayed polls in Somalia, and votes in Chad and Libya that should mark milestones on the transition to democratic rule. For its part, Mali's transitional government is unlikely to stick to its commitment to hold elections in February. Ensuring that these processes stay on track will be a challenge for the AU.

The organisation's twentieth anniversary year will also be an important one for multilateral engagement. AU and European Union (EU) leaders are due to meet for their triennial summit – postponed from 2020 – on 17-18 February in Brussels. Egypt will host COP27, the next edition of the UN's annual conference on climate change, providing an opportunity for the AU to steer the direction of global conversations about how climate change drives conflict.

When African leaders meet in February, the continent's most pressing peace and security crises should be at the top of their agenda. Eight areas to which Sall, his counterparts and the wider AU should direct their energy in 2022 are:

1. Keeping Chad's transition on track;
2. Securing a ceasefire in Ethiopia;
3. Developing a strategy for the return of foreign fighters from Libya;
4. Promoting a multipronged approach to Mozambique's Cabo Delgado crisis;
5. Supporting dialogue in the Sahel;
6. Reforming the AU Mission in Somalia;
7. Helping restore Sudan's transition; and
8. Putting climate security on the international agenda.

This list, which is certainly not exhaustive, highlights opportunities for the AU to positively shape trends, curb conflicts and save lives over the coming year. As it celebrates its twentieth birthday, the organisation should seek to reinvigorate its role in continental peace and security and redouble efforts to tackle Africa's crises.

1. Keeping Chad's Transition on Track

Following the battlefield death of long-time Chadian President Idriss Déby Itno on 20 April 2021, a group of army generals installed his 37-year-old son Mahamat Déby as leader of a fifteen-member Transitional Military Council. In 2000, the AU's predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity, adopted rules allowing it to suspend membership of states that have had an unconstitutional change of government. The AU has enforced those rules before, but in this case it did not sanction Chad.¹ Now, however, as it deploys additional personnel to N'Djamena, the AU should work to hold the military council to the promises it made when it seized power: a national dialogue, due to begin in mid-February, and elections to be held before the end of 2022.²

Mahamat Déby's appointment led to intense debate among PSC members over whether to suspend Chad from the organisation. Supporters of suspension wanted to avoid perceptions of double standards, given that the AU had previously disbarred Guinea and Mali over their respective coups.³ Others argued that Chad should be spared because it contributes so many troops to counter-terrorist missions in the Sahel and Lake Chad basin and because suspension could destabilise its domestic politics. Additionally, they reasoned that Chad's leadership change was constitutional because the speaker of parliament, next in line for the presidency under the constitution, publicly supported the transition, and because the ruling party stayed in power.⁴

¹ "Lomé Declaration on the framework for an Organisation of African Unity response to unconstitutional changes of government", AU AHG/Decl.5 (XXXVI), July 2000.

² André Kodmadjingar, "Le dialogue national tchadien repoussé au 15 février", VOA, 4 January 2022.

³ Some member states complained that the fact that the AU Commission chair, Moussa Faki Mahamat, is Chadian influenced member states' decisions. Others said Chad had used its own PSC seat to shield itself. Crisis Group online interviews, African and Western diplomats and AU officials, November-December 2021.

⁴ "AU balancing act on Chad's coup sets a disturbing precedent", Institute for Security Studies, 2 June 2021. Crisis Group online interview, AU official, December 2021.

In order to find a middle ground, the PSC decided not to suspend Chad, but instead to set a number of ground rules for the junta.⁵ These included, among others, demands that the junta alter the transitional charter to limit the interim period's length to eighteen months and bar its leaders from running in eventual elections. The military council swiftly agreed to these conditions, but it has yet to amend the charter, saying the revisions will be a topic of discussion during the national dialogue. The PSC also called for the appointment of a high representative who would work with Chadian authorities to organise free and fair elections, as well as the creation of an AU-led support mechanism – a team of electoral and constitutional experts and political and military advisers backing the high representative.

The AU's response to the Chadian situation has faced some criticism. Some observers perceived the decision not to suspend Chad as undermining the organisation's credibility.⁶ In early July, the AU took another blow when N'Djamena rejected Senegalese diplomat Ibrahima Fall, its choice for high representative, on the grounds that it had not consulted the junta about the decision – a version of events the AU disputes.⁷ Since Idriss Déby's death, the AU's international partners have looked to it to take the lead on Chad. Now, with Congolese diplomat Basile Ikouébé installed as its high representative, and its support mechanism being deployed, the AU should step up efforts to ensure that the Chadian transition stays on track.

The transition has made some encouraging progress. Most Chadian stakeholders have agreed to join the forthcoming national dialogue, which is aimed, among other things, at resolving contentious constitutional and electoral issues. Citizens have also been able to voice their expectations of the process through local consultations. Before the dialogue takes place, however, the junta will need to shore up support from the public. To this end, the AU, backed by international partners, should encourage the military council to reaffirm publicly that the transition will not exceed eighteen months and that military council members will not run in the presidential election.⁸ The AU could also provide support to help the dialogue's participants reach consensus on key electoral rules. Such an agreement would go some way toward lessening political tensions during the transition's final stage.

Authorities have also taken steps to include armed groups – known in Chad as “politico-military groups” – in the national dialogue. In August, the junta asked a committee led by former President Goukouni Oueddei to make an inventory of the main rebel groups' demands. One of these mainly Libya-based insurgencies was involved in the fighting that led to Déby's death and, although it is weakened, it could launch new offensives if negotiations with Chadian authorities fail. Late in 2021, Oueddei's committee spoke with armed group representatives in cities outside Chad, including Paris, Doha and Cairo. Since then, the junta has accepted some of the con-

⁵ “Communiqué on the 996th meeting of the AU PSC on the consideration of the report of the fact-finding mission to the Republic of Chad”, AU PSC PSC/BR/COMM.(CMXCVI), 14 May 2021.

⁶ Crisis Group online interviews, African and Western diplomats and AU officials, November-December 2021.

⁷ Crisis Group Commentary, “Getting Chad's Transition on Track”, 30 September 2021.

⁸ In May 2021, the AU called upon the Chadian authorities to review the transitional charter and put these conditions, as well as others, in place. Communiqué on the 996th meeting of the AU PSC, op. cit.

ditions that rebel leaders say must be met if they are to participate in the dialogue, including amnesty and restitution of property.

Chadian authorities and armed groups are set to hold further talks in Doha in February. Participants are likely to discuss thorny issues such as disarmament, tied to possible financial compensation, as well as integration of rebel fighters into the army. The AU should support these talks and put pressure on the various stakeholders to keep their commitments following the negotiations.

2. Secure a Ceasefire in Ethiopia

Over the last fourteen months, Ethiopia's civil war has killed tens of thousands and displaced an estimated two million. It now threatens more than nine million with acute hunger. Reports describe widespread use of sexual and gender-based violence as a weapon of war on all sides. The momentum has ebbed and flowed between the federal coalition, which includes Eritrea's military, and the Tigray region's forces, but in December the Tigrayans' retreat to their home region and their leaders' call for talks created an opportunity for peace. Although fighting has continued on Tigray's borders, the federal government has said it will not push further into the region. It released jailed opposition leaders in early January.⁹ The parties must seize this moment if they are to avoid the loss of countless more Ethiopian lives. Former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, the AU's high representative for the Horn of Africa, should keep working closely with U.S. and EU counterparts, as well as the UN secretary-general and Kenyan officials – all of whom have been trying to stem the crisis – to kickstart a process that can bring an end to hostilities.

The AU has faced criticism for inaction since armed confrontations began in November 2020. Indeed, the AU has found it hard to weigh in on the Tigray conflict, in part because the federal government frames the fighting as a domestic problem. The fact that Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa is home to the AU headquarters complicates matters. Ethiopia's seat on the AU PSC has also stymied efforts to put the crisis on the Council's agenda. The country's term on the PSC ends in 2022, and unless it secures a second term, its absence from the council could allow more frequent discussions and firmer action.

Despite these hurdles, the AU has tried to engage on Ethiopia. In November 2020, the AU Assembly chairperson, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, dispatched three high-level envoys to Addis. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed rebuffed their calls for dialogue and dismissed their requests for access to Tigray. It then took the AU Commission chair until August 2021 to appoint Obasanjo as his envoy.¹⁰ While Obasanjo's mandate covers almost the entire region – except for Somalia and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam – it was widely understood that he would focus mainly on the Tigray crisis.¹¹ Still, to take a lead in securing a formal ceasefire, Obasanjo will need

⁹ "Ethiopia says its army will not advance further into Tigray", Africa News, 24 December 2021. Dawit Endeshaw, "Ethiopia frees opposition leaders from prison, announces political dialogue", Reuters, 8 January 2022.

¹⁰ "The Chairperson of the AU Commission appoints former President H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria as High Representative for the Horn of Africa", press release, AU, 26 August 2021.

¹¹ Crisis Group online interviews, African and Western diplomats and AU officials, November-December 2021.

more support from the AU than he receives at present. The AU Commission and AU member states should ensure that he has the resources and authority to hire the specialised personnel required – including, if requested, staff seconded from external partners.

With a strong team in place, together with international counterparts, Obasanjo should try to persuade federal authorities and Tigray's leadership to formally cease hostilities before discussing detailed ceasefire arrangements and ideally a political settlement. He should insist that the government lift restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian aid to famine-stricken Tigray and restore services. If talks get under way, an initial confidence-building step could entail the two sides first recognising each other's legitimacy and exchanging prisoners of war. The AU, alongside other outside actors, should support federal government plans to facilitate a national dialogue, lobbying for a fully inclusive process. The dialogue should be preceded by an amnesty – building on the welcome releases in early January – for all opposition figures who are on trial for terrorism and other alleged offences. Obasanjo's team should advocate for such an amnesty as part of its push for an inclusive dialogue. It should also call for the release of thousands of mostly Tigrayan and Oromo civilians detained without charge under emergency laws introduced in November.

To support Obasanjo's efforts, the AU could propose broadening Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta's bilateral engagement to bring in other African heads of state in order to constitute a group of five mediators, one from each of the AU's geographical regions. Such an initiative could enhance Obasanjo's chances of success, especially if it can convince Eritrea to play a less destructive role. The AU has undertaken similar mediation efforts before. Both Kenyatta, who has discussed with leaders and previously tried to bring the warring parties' representatives together, and Sall, the incoming AU chair, are well placed to lead such an initiative (even if Kenyatta may be preoccupied with tense elections at home in August). Additionally, the AU PSC, which held its first stand-alone meeting on Ethiopia on 8 November 2021, should convene regularly to support Obasanjo's work on the crisis and push for the steps mentioned above.¹² Given the serious reports of sexual and gender-based violence during the civil war, the AU and its partners should also support existing international and regional investigations of human rights abuses.

3. Develop a Strategy for the Return of Foreign Fighters from Libya

Libya's peace process is slowly advancing, but its political transition appears at risk of derailing after the presidential election scheduled for December 2021 was cancelled at the last minute. The country is now due to hold the vote in 2022. But various factions, including politicians in power, continue to lobby to postpone it indefinitely. The same groups want to put off the legislative elections that are supposed to happen a few months after the presidential vote. The AU has very limited sway over Libya's internal politics and should instead support UN-led political mediation aimed at

¹² "Communiqué of the 1045th meeting of the AU PSC", AU PSC/PR/COMM.1045(2021), 8 November 2021. Although the communiqué from this session added little new to the AU position, merely featuring it on the PSC agenda signalled that AU member states were watching.

drawing up a new roadmap. But where the AU could carve out a space for itself is in facilitating the removal of Chadian and Sudanese fighters operating in Libya.

Libyan parties and outside powers agree that Libya's future stability is contingent on the departure of foreign fighters, as set out in an October 2020 ceasefire. The AU and its member states have expressed grave concerns about the forcible removal of Chadian and Sudanese armed groups from Libyan soil, however, fearing the consequences of such a move. They understandably worry that the fighters, who operate as guns for hire in Libya but hail from rebel groups opposed to authorities in their home countries, could threaten the region's stability if they are forced to leave Libya against their will. While much of the discussion on Libya focuses on the country's internal dynamics, the AU should consult with, and lobby on behalf of, African states that will be directly affected by the measure to help minimise the potentially negative impact of the fighters' return.¹³

The AU, whose PSC has met repeatedly to discuss the issue, should work to encourage a smooth withdrawal process. At its most recent meeting, on 30 September, the PSC stressed that foreign fighters should withdraw in an "orderly, coordinated and incremental manner". The AU should press Libya, Libya's partners and the receiving countries to develop a clear strategy for relocating the fighters, focusing on disarmament and reintegration.

Having long felt excluded from peacemaking in Libya, the AU is now getting more involved. Libya has been a source of great discontent for many at the AU since 2011, when the organisation's calls for political dialogue were ignored in favour of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led military intervention to oust Muammar al-Qadhafi. Since then, the AU has been marginal to the Libya peace process. While some Western countries agree that the AU should have a role in Libya discussions, they complain that when given a seat at the table, the AU often fails to show up or capitalise on the opportunity.¹⁴ Recently, though, the AU has increased its engagement on Libya, including a visit by members of the AU's Political Affairs and Peace and Security Department to carry out a needs assessment with stakeholders in the country.

In order to further strengthen its engagement, the AU should better organise the myriad of initiatives it maintains. These include the High-Level Ad Hoc Committee, the special envoy of the AU Commission chairperson and the supporting liaison office in Libya. The AU should clarify the division of labour among these initiatives, many of which have overlapping mandates. Further, the AU should follow up on a 2020 decision to upgrade the AU liaison office to the level of mission and to give it the political, diplomatic and military staff it requires. Strengthening the AU's presence in Libya could also increase its ability to consult with the country's neighbours in discussions about the removal of foreign fighters.

¹³ "Ministerial session on the consideration of the projected impact of withdrawal of foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya on the Sahel and the rest of Africa", *Amani Africa*, 30 September 2021.

¹⁴ Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°166, *Eight Priorities for the African Union in 2021*, 3 February 2021.

4. Promote a Multipronged Approach to Mozambique's Cabo Delgado crisis

An insurgency in Mozambique's northernmost province of Cabo Delgado has killed more than 3,000 people and displaced over 750,000.¹⁵ Forces from Rwanda and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have managed to drive the insurgents out of their main strongholds, but militants have broken into smaller groups to mount hit-and-run attacks on soldiers and civilians. Some groups are spreading into neighbouring Niassa province.¹⁶ While the international military intervention has dealt a significant blow to the insurgents, resolving the crisis will require further measures that get at its underlying causes. The AU should push the Mozambican government to consider ways to address the militants' grievances, primarily their demand that the province's population benefit more from exploitation of its mineral and hydrocarbon resources. Though the militants are now on the back foot, they could easily rebound to regain territory if Maputo's partners were to pull out prematurely.

It will first be crucial for the AU to find ways of supporting the SADC Mission in Mozambique. SADC and Rwandan officials say the Mozambican army could need twelve months to acquire the capacity it requires to tackle the Cabo Delgado crisis alone.¹⁷ Some Mozambican officials say the upgrade may take even longer, possibly several years.¹⁸ At a SADC meeting in Pretoria in December, several officials questioned whether the mission in Mozambique can secure future funding, expressing concern that Maputo might ask it to stay on the ground for a prolonged period.¹⁹

The AU could help identify alternative funding sources for the SADC mission. The EU has signalled that it would be willing to use its new funding mechanism, the European Peace Facility, to support the mission.²⁰ But Brussels will not cover the operation's entire cost, as it is determined to avoid repeating the experience of footing the bill for the AU's mission in Somalia, now in its fourteenth year.²¹

Beyond the SADC mission's future, the AU should press Maputo to deal with the insurgents' substantive demands. While many of the insurgency's leaders – some of whom are foreigners, mostly from Tanzania – appear to be hardened jihadists, the group's rank and file are Mozambicans, motivated less by ideology than by frustrations with perceived political and economic exclusion. The development of Cabo Delgado's vast mineral and hydrocarbon deposits, in particular the French company Total's multibillion-dollar liquefied gas project, has aggravated these grievances. The AU should push Maputo to redouble development efforts in the province to win back the trust of disillusioned youth who may otherwise be tempted to join the insurgency. It should also encourage Maputo to open direct dialogue with insurgents, aimed at

¹⁵ Crisis Group Africa Report N°303, *Stemming the Insurrection in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado*, 11 June 2021.

¹⁶ "Cabo Ligado Weekly: 29 November-5 December", Cabo Ligado, December 2021; Joseph Hanlon, "Mozambique: War spreads to Niassa", All Africa, 2 December 2021.

¹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, SADC and Rwandan officials, Pemba, December 2021.

¹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Mozambican defence official, Maputo, December 2021.

¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, sources close to the talks, including SADC officials, Pretoria, December 2021.

²⁰ Crisis Group online interviews, EU diplomats, Addis Ababa and Maputo, November-December 2021.

²¹ Crisis Group online interview, EU diplomat, Addis Ababa, November 2021.

persuading them to surrender with assurances that they can do so safely. A government-funded demobilisation program that allows fighters to quit the insurgency and prepare for return to civilian life is also needed.

The AU can also assist in efforts to address the insurgency's cross-border contacts. The insurgents rely for training and financing, as well as some recruiting, on networks reaching up the Swahili coast as far up as Somalia, and possibly westward to the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as to cells in South Africa. The AU could encourage collaboration between regional bodies facing the transnational jihadist threat – the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, East African Community and SADC. For example, it could push relevant member states to increase intelligence and law enforcement cooperation, focusing on investigations into transnational financial networks underpinning the insurgency and restricting the movement of jihadists trying to join the fight in Cabo Delgado.²² The AU could also support the SADC counter-terrorism cooperation centre that is being created in Tanzania by coordinating relevant information from other regions and its own counter-terrorism centre.

5. Support Dialogue in the Sahel

Turbulence in the Sahel continues to mount, with a particularly bloody end to 2021. The coalition that has tried to stem the chaos for nearly a decade – a patchwork of local, regional, French, European and UN forces – is floundering as jihadist insurgencies stiffen their resolve to impose sharia in areas under their control and political discord in Mali deepens. After acknowledging the limits of its military-first approach, France has begun to withdraw troops from the Sahel, handing over responsibility for the counter-insurgency campaign it has led to a European task force. Mali's transitional authorities have said they want closer cooperation with Russia, while the Wagner Group, a Russian private military contractor, has reportedly begun sending mercenaries to buttress the anti-jihadist fight.²³ With efforts to stabilise the Sahel thus entering a new phase, the AU should redefine its approach to the crisis by identifying where it can best bring value. It should also encourage dialogue efforts and regional attempts to maintain, or return to, constitutional rule.

Jihadist violence and intercommunal conflict have killed thousands in recent years, feeding perceptions that Sahelian governments are unable to protect their citizens. Discontent is growing, as is anti-French sentiment. In May, officers in Mali orchestrated a second coup in less than a year, shifting attention from the security crisis to political intrigue in Bamako. In Burkina Faso, an outcry after the deadliest militant

²² Crisis Group interviews, South African security sources following the Islamic State's financial trail in the SADC region, Johannesburg, December 2021. Notably, the Allied Democratic Forces – a rebel group that emerged in Uganda in the early 1990s and later took refuge in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo – has since 2018 absorbed more foreign fighters, including from Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Kenya, and also gave combat training to insurgents from Cabo Delgado as late as that year. For more details, see Dino Mahtani, "The Kampala Attacks and Their Regional Implications", Crisis Group Commentary, 19 November 2021.

²³ Around 450 mercenaries have already arrived in Mali, according to French military sources cited by Radio France Internationale. The Malian authorities deny hiring the Wagner Group, however, and state that they are working with Russian instructors. "Mali : 200 mercenaires du groupe Wagner à Ségou dans le nord-est du pays", RFI, 10 January 2022.

attack on the security forces to date led the government to collapse in December. Then, on 24 January, the armed forces ousted President Kaboré, receiving immediate support from part of the population that feels a military officer would be better able than a democratically elected civilian to halt jihadist violence. Although seemingly more stable than its neighbours, Niger also faces persistent militant attacks in its western reaches. Authorities thwarted an attempted coup two days before President Mohamed Bazoum took office on 2 April 2021, and continued insecurity could foreshadow similar incidents in the future.

The stalemate has pushed some Sahelian governments to engage in dialogue with militants, often indirectly. Dialogue initiatives in Mali and Burkina Faso have produced local ceasefires and at least temporary lulls in violence. While governments should continue to support local dialogue, high-level negotiations with top jihadist leaders are worth exploring as an option that could yield stronger prospects for peace. Mali's transitional authorities have said they are thinking about starting such talks, but Burkina Faso and Niger remain officially opposed to the idea.

The AU, which last published a stabilisation strategy for the Sahel in 2014, needs to refocus its efforts. Although the military-first approach has failed to reduce the bloodshed, the AU Commission and some member states appear to be mulling over a proposal put forward in late 2020 to deploy 3,000 AU troops to the Sahel. Several other member states oppose the plan, which lacks a sustainable funding source and clarity as to which countries would contribute troops or how command and control would work. Even if the AU resolves these questions, it is far from clear how dispatching additional soldiers to the Sahel would benefit the existing security setup. The AU should consider abandoning this time-consuming initiative and rededicating itself to diplomacy.

The AU should lend its support to mediation efforts, even if they are a distant prospect for now. If an elected government in the region warms up to the idea of high-level talks with jihadist commanders, the AU could help mediation teams independently or in concert with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) prepare the ground for such talks. To best support Sahelian states in exploring the dialogue option, the AU needs to bolster its existing mission for Mali and the Sahel, known as MISAHHEL. The organisation recently expanded the mission's mandate to include supporting Guinea's transition, but MISAHHEL has so little money it can barely perform its duties.²⁴ The AU should consider appointing staff dedicated to each country that MISAHHEL covers and add personnel specialised in mediation to the mission's team, to help support existing mediation efforts. To boost mediation capacity, it could then draw on insights from local think-tanks and scholars.

With greater prominence in the Sahel, the AU would also be better positioned to caution against unconstitutional changes of government and help dissuade restive militaries from taking repressive action in response to popular malaise. In Mali, the junta is renegeing on its previous pledge by signalling its intent to stay in power well beyond 2022 rather than step aside after holding elections in February – a recent

²⁴ Following a coup that saw Guinea's special forces arrest President Alpha Condé on 5 September, the AU suspended Guinea from all AU activities. "Communiqué of the 1030th meeting of the AU PSC on the situation in the Republic of Guinea", AU PSC/PR/COMM.(1030(2021)), 10 September 2021.

calendar they put forward envisaged elections in December 2025. In response, ECOWAS placed additional sanctions on the Malian authorities.²⁵ The AU endorsed this decision but did not go so far as to suspend Mali's membership, instead calling for a return to constitutional order within sixteen months.²⁶ Coordinated international pressure will be needed to impel the junta to organise polls sooner rather than later. The AU's recent offer to mediate between Bamako and ECOWAS is a step in the right direction.

Still, engagement in the Sahel may become more complicated following the coup in Burkina Faso, which threatens to upset the balance of power in the region. Events in Burkina Faso, along with coups in Guinea and Mali in 2021, mean that military leaders now rule one fifth of the ECOWAS member states. There is a risk that the three countries could form an alliance to resist pressure from ECOWAS, the AU and beyond. Indeed, in a first indication of this dynamic, Guinea's junta leader, Mamadi Doumbouya, decided not to close his country's border with Mali, despite an ECOWAS embargo. Complicating matters further is the fact the new junta in Ouagadougou enjoys some popular support. Following its suspension of Burkina Faso, the AU should now work to support any national or regional attempts to restore constitutional order.

6. Reform the AU Mission in Somalia

The UN mandate for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was due to expire on 31 December 2021, but after much discussion, the UN Security Council extended the mandate by three months, giving partners additional time to hammer out a plan for the mission's future, although the window is rapidly closing. Questions remain, however, over modalities including the mission's funding, composition and exit plan. The AU and AMISOM's five troop-contributing countries seek reliable funding to keep the mission going. Yet the main donor, the EU, which pays AU soldiers' stipends, is increasingly weary of bankrolling a costly intervention that lacks a clear termination plan. It has signalled more funding cuts in 2022. Like other outside actors, Brussels feels that the mission provides declining value for money.

There is general consensus that the AU mission needs to change but not about precisely how. Initially serving as an offensive mission following its deployment nearly fifteen years ago, AMISOM today acts more as a holding force preventing Al-Shabaab's insurgency from recapturing areas it has cleared of militants. The government wants Somali troops to take over AMISOM's security responsibility, but the national army is still developing and often too weak or divided to keep Al-Shabaab at bay, partly because political tensions between Mogadishu and Somalia's regions, or federal member states, have disrupted plans to solicit troops from these regions for the federal army. Al-Shabaab's resilience means that stakeholders are reluctant to wind AMISOM down now. But while donors and partners acknowledge that AMISOM urgently re-

²⁵ "4th Extraordinary Summit of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government on the Political Situation in Mali", communiqué, ECOWAS, 9 January 2022.

²⁶ "Communiqué of the 1057th meeting of the PSC on the situation in Mali", AU PSC/PR/COMM.1/1057(2022), 14 January 2022.

quires major changes, the AU, UN and Somali government have expressed fundamental disagreement about the shape of those reforms.

In 2021, the quarrel between the AU and UN came to a head over the composition of an independent assessment team, commissioned by the UN Security Council to explore AMISOM's future. Denied joint leadership of the team, the AU set up a rival enquiry and instructed its staff, including those in AMISOM, not to cooperate with the UN investigation.²⁷ The two bodies then published separate evaluations with distinctly different conclusions. Complicating matters further, the AU PSC has insisted on transforming AMISOM into an AU-UN hybrid mission – one of four options outlined in the AU's report – in part because it would draw on UN assessed contributions, providing more predictable financing than it now enjoys. The proposal is a non-starter, however. The U.S. and UK oppose funding AMISOM through UN assessed contributions, while the Somali government rejects the idea of a hybrid mission. The PSC's persistent pursuit of a hybrid mission damaged already weakened ties with Mogadishu.²⁸

In late January, the parties took a positive step. A technical committee made up representatives from the AU and the federal government of Somalia outlined a basic plan that bypassed the hybrid option – although it left questions around funding and mission size unanswered. This plan has yet to come before the PSC, however.

In order to repair relations with the UN and Somali government, and to move the tortuous discussion of AMISOM's future forward, the PSC should formally endorse the option of a reconfigured AU mission. The UN Security Council should reciprocate by committing to help the AU find predictable funding. Once a compromise has been found, all parties can then focus on the technical details of the new mission's structure. Further, setting a clear timeline for the reconfigured mission will enable better planning and reassure donors, as long as it reflects ground realities. The federal government insists on a transition by the end of 2023, but a longer horizon might be more realistic in order to give Somalia's leadership adequate time to resolve political tensions with federal member states and bolster the army.

There are clear steps the AU can take to reinvigorate AMISOM. These include diversifying AMISOM's troop-contributing countries, which would add new capabilities and reduce the dominance of the five countries in Somalia's immediate neighbourhood that are supplying the boots on the ground – and some of which pursue their own political interests in Somalia. AMISOM should also start closing remote bases that serve little strategic purpose, which would free up troops and allow the mission to undertake more offensive operations.²⁹

To cover the funding gap left by expected reductions in EU contributions, the AU should try to solicit new bilateral donors for AMISOM, for example by reapproach-

²⁷ Crisis Group online interviews, AU and UN officials, November-December 2021.

²⁸ Aggrey Mutambo, "Ghana ex-president Mahama quits as African Union Envoy to Somalia", *The East African*, 21 May 2021. In mid-2021, the AU appointed former Ghanaian President John Mahama as an envoy to help mediate a political impasse in Somalia, but the Somali government rejected him, citing bias. On 4 November, Mogadishu declared AMISOM's deputy head persona non grata and ordered him to leave the country, stating that his activities were incompatible with both AMISOM's mandate and Somalia's security strategy.

²⁹ For detail on these steps, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°176, *Reforming the AU Mission in Somalia*, 15 November 2021.

ing countries that have an interest in maintaining stability in Somalia, including China, Turkey and Gulf Arab monarchies. (The AU tried to get funding from these countries in 2018, when the EU previously cut its AMISOM contribution, but to no avail.) Further, the AU, which argues that it provides support in kind and whose soldiers have already paid a high price in combat, should review its own funding capabilities. For example, it could draw a small amount from the AU Peace Fund. Though this gesture would be largely symbolic, given the small sums available in the fund, it could strengthen the AU's relationship with AMISOM's current and potential donors.³⁰

7. Help Restore Sudan's Transition

On 25 October 2021, Sudan's military leaders announced a state of emergency and dissolved the Sovereign Council, the civilian-military executive body piloting the transition following the April 2019 ouster of Omar al-Bashir. One month later, Sudanese-led mediation efforts culminated in an agreement reinstating deposed Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok. The deal faced heavy criticism from many Sudanese men, women and youth, who came out in the thousands to protest the power grab. Nor did it receive the backing of the civilian officials who had signed on to the 2019 agreement with the military. On 2 January, Hamdok resigned in frustration after failing to persuade the generals to honour their commitments. The AU and other outside powers should exert pressure on Sudan's top brass to engage with representatives of the protest movement and agree on a roadmap for the restoration of civilian rule, lest the country plunge deeper into prolonged, bloody unrest.

The AU, together with Ethiopia, was instrumental in brokering the 2019 civilian-military power-sharing agreement that laid out a clear roadmap for Sudan's transition to democratic rule. It has since stepped back from its role as guarantor and watchdog. It did, however, play an important part in responding to the October coup. Despite significant divisions among its members, the PSC suspended Sudan's AU membership until such times as the civilian-led transitional authority is reinstated.³¹ Since then, unfortunately, the AU has largely sat on the sidelines.³²

Sudan's political impasse presents an opportunity for the AU to take a lead in the mediation, as it did in 2019. To be most effective, the AU should appoint a high-level envoy solely mandated to Sudan and based in Khartoum to enable consistent, sustained engagement. He or she could be part of a panel that could be led by the AU's high representative for the Horn of Africa or stand alone. Both of these options would require clear division of labour between the two envoys. The Sudan envoy should be supported by AU representatives already in the Sudanese capital.

³⁰ While it is highly unlikely that the Security Council will agree to using UN assessed contributions, the UN could instead look at creative ways of increasing financing to its support office in Somalia and call on member states to add to AMISOM's trust fund.

³¹ "Communiqué of the 1041st meeting of the PSC on the situation in Sudan", AU PSC/PR/COMM. 1041 (2021), 26 October 2021. The decision was hard-fought: PSC members Algeria and Egypt reportedly wanted to send a PSC fact-finding mission before making a decision on suspension. Crisis Group online interviews, African diplomats, Addis Ababa, November-December 2021.

³² Although Obasanjo, the newly appointed AU Horn high representative, briefly visited Khartoum on 3 November, the PSC has not undertaken a mission to Sudan to meet with stakeholders and the AU chairperson has yet to dispatch an emissary, as called for in the PSC's 26 October 2021 communiqué.

Together with other external actors, the AU should exert pressure on the military to meet with representatives of the protest movement to chart a path toward a return to a civilian-led transition. Largely mobilised by neighbourhood committees – informal grassroots entities – this movement demands the military’s exit from politics. But given the coup and the generals’ decades-long dominance, some role for the military is inevitable. A middle ground might be restoration of the status quo ante, with a civilian prime minister fronted by the protest movement and mandated to appoint a cabinet, and a consensus-based roadmap to free elections and full civilian rule. Military leaders’ fear of facing charges for crimes committed during the Bashir era and losing the large parts of Sudan’s agricultural and industrial sectors they control might be a factor in their decisions. If the generals refuse to compromise, the AU should impose individual sanctions on anyone spoiling progress – it took similar measures against Guinea’s junta in 2009.³³

Crucially, the AU must remain engaged. A lack of attention – from the AU and others – left the previous civilian leadership unsupported, opening space for the generals to oust it. The PSC should demonstrate that it is seized of the situation by holding regular meetings on Sudan to track the transition’s progress. Further, the Commission should focus on bolstering the capacity of its liaison office in Khartoum, a step it has long planned but not yet actually taken. Persistent pressure on the transitional leadership will be needed until the date of elections and afterward.

8. Put Climate Security on the International Agenda

In November 2022, the Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (known as COP) returns to Africa, with Egypt hosting its 27th edition. While COP and other international forums, including the UN Security Council, have struggled to address the impact of climate change on peace and security, the AU and its member states have already recognised the risks that changing weather patterns pose to the continent.³⁴ With all eyes on Africa in 2022, the AU should seize the opportunity to put climate security front and centre.

So far, climate security has not featured on the official COP agenda, and action on the issue seems likely to lag behind other items, in part because participants feel it could prove too divisive for a forum that seeks apolitical shared solutions. The AU, UN and World Bank have nonetheless made efforts to include climate security on the COP27 agenda.³⁵ Even if the issue remains excluded, any climate adaptation proposals that are advanced at COP will need to take account of conflict risks, lest the

³³ “Communiqué of the 207th meeting of the AU PSC on the situation in Guinea”, AU PSC/AHG/COMM.2(CCVII), 29 October 2009.

³⁴ “Communiqué of the 984th meeting of the AU PSC at the level of Heads of State and Government on ‘Sustainable Peace in Africa: Climate Change and its Effects on Peace and Security in the Continent’”, AU PSC/AHG/COMM.1 (CMLXXXIV), 9 March 2021; “Communiqué of the 1051st meeting of the AU PSC on ‘Climate Change and Peace and Security: The need for an Informed Climate-Security-Development nexus for Africa’”, PSC/PR/COMM.1051 (2021), 26 November 2021.

³⁵ Among others, the Africa Climate Mobility Initiative – a collaboration between the UN, AU Commission and World Bank launched on 28 September 2021 – aims to support the Commission and African nations’ efforts to harness the potential of mobility – including migration, planned relocation and forced displacement – amid the climate crisis, as well as to address climate-forced displacement and migration.

measures wind up harming the very people they are intended to help. An alternative to putting climate security on the agenda itself would be to hold an annual high-level conference on the issue on COP's sidelines. Such an event could help ensure that COP negotiators do not disregard conflict dynamics during their deliberations. Egypt, as host, should consider setting one up at COP27.

It is not just at COP that climate security is inadequately discussed – the UN Security Council has also had difficulty addressing the issue directly. Climate change is often described correctly as a “threat multiplier”, but many members interpret this phrase to mean that the Council should discuss only the dangers that climate distress exacerbates – such as political and socio-economic tensions – and not climate change itself. In December 2021, Russia vetoed a draft resolution calling for enhanced international efforts to respond to the implications of climate change for peace and security. India opposed the draft on similar grounds to Russia, and China abstained.³⁶

By contrast, the AU PSC has met numerous times to discuss climate-related security challenges.³⁷ It is not surprising that African countries recognise the importance of addressing the issue, as the continent stands to be one of the worst-affected by global warming and is already experiencing climate-induced violence. South Sudan is but one example. There, several years of catastrophic flooding have displaced hundreds of thousands, including ethnic Dinka herders who fled southward to the Equatoria region. The forced migration has further strained relations between Equatorian and Dinka elites, aggravating pre-existing grievances and intercommunal tensions over land and power, while exacerbating the conflict dynamics in the region.³⁸

Many climate-fragile countries also face conflict and poor governance, which tend to delay adaptation and mitigation measures to combat climate change. In the Sahel, climatic distress has resulted in the erosion of traditional land use arrangements, inflaming farmer-herder disputes and uprooting hundreds of thousands as in South Sudan. In some Sahelian locales, failure to regulate land use has contributed to the rise of jihadist and self-defence groups.³⁹

The AU PSC has meanwhile taken several steps prioritising climate security. In May 2018, it requested that the AU Commission chair appoint an envoy for climate change. Two years later, in a head of state-level meeting, the PSC reiterated its desire for an envoy, called for a common African position and established an AU Special Fund for Climate Change.⁴⁰ It also called for a climate-related security risks assess-

³⁶ “Russia vetoes UN Security Council resolution linking climate crisis to international peace”, *The Guardian*, 13 December 2021; Crisis Group Commentary, “How UN Member States Divided Over Climate Security”, 22 December 2021.

³⁷ “Communiqué of the 984th meeting of the AU”, op. cit.; “Communiqué of the 1051st meeting of the AU PSC”, op. cit.

³⁸ For more, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°169, *South Sudan's Other War: Resolving the Insurgency in Equatoria*, 25 February 2021.

³⁹ Ulrich Eberle and Andrew Ciacchi, “Getting Conflict into the Global Climate Conversation”, Crisis Group Commentary, 5 November 2021.

⁴⁰ “Communiqué of the 984th meeting of the AU”, op. cit.; “Communiqué of the 1051st meeting of the AU PSC”, op. cit. At its 26 November 2021 meeting, the PSC clarified that this fund would support measures to combat the negative impact of climate change, as well as the Continental Civil Capacity for Disaster Preparedness and Response.

ment study, which will likely lay the foundation for the AU's response to climate security, and continues to press member states to adopt a common position on the issue.⁴¹

The AU should follow through on these commitments. African leaders should make good on their pledge to develop a common continental position. The Commission should strive to complete the risk assessment, while its chair should appoint an envoy with sufficient political weight to lobby international actors to support climate-related conflict prevention efforts and develop standards for how to avoid aggravating local conflict when spending climate adaptation funds. Additionally, the Commission should increase cooperation among the different departments that work on climate change, including Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment, Infrastructure and Energy, and Political Affairs and Peace and Security.

Nairobi/Brussels, 1 February 2022

⁴¹ "Communiqué of the 1051st meeting of the AU PSC", op. cit.

Appendix A: The African Union's Priorities in 2022

Climate Security With Egypt hosting the UN Conference on Climate Change, the AU should aim to put climate security front and centre of global discussions.

Libya Help facilitate the removal of Chadian and Sudanese fighters operating in Libya.

Sahel Support dialogue efforts and regional attempts to maintain, or return to, constitutional rule.

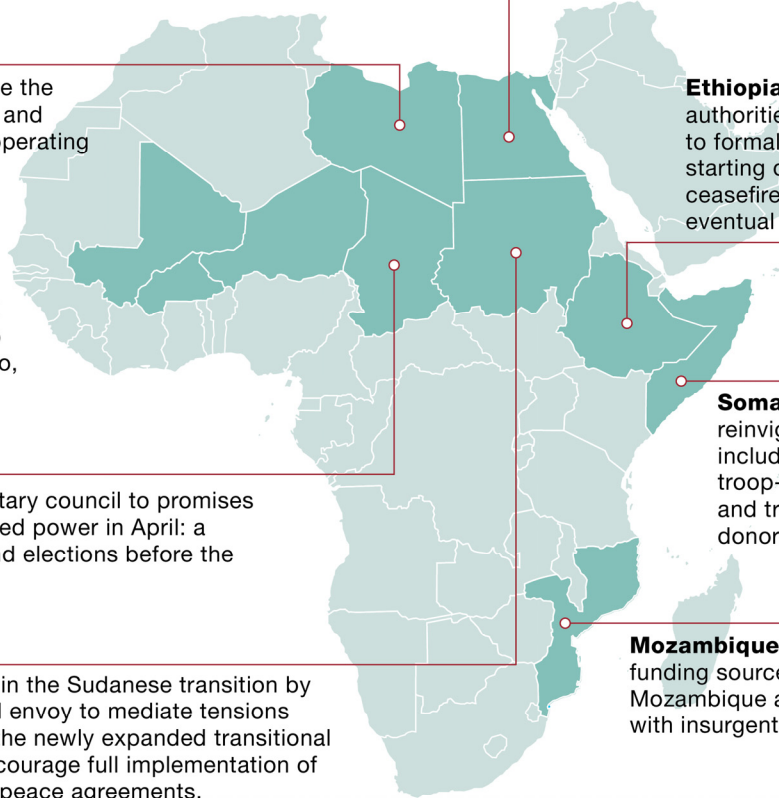
Chad Hold the military council to promises it made when it seized power in April: a national dialogue and elections before the end of 2022.

Sudan Re-engage in the Sudanese transition by appointing a special envoy to mediate tensions between parties to the newly expanded transitional government and encourage full implementation of the transitional and peace agreements.

Ethiopia Persuade the federal authorities and Tigray's leadership to formally cease hostilities before starting discussions on detailed ceasefire arrangements and an eventual political settlement.

Somalia Take clear steps to reinvigorate AMISOM – including diversifying troop-contributing countries – and try to solicit new bilateral donors for the mission.

Mozambique Help identify alternative funding sources for the SADC mission in Mozambique and press Maputo to deal with insurgents' underlying grievances.



Appendix B: Reports and Briefings on Africa since 2019

Special Reports and Briefings

Council of Despair? The Fragmentation of UN Diplomacy, Special Briefing N°1, 30 April 2019.

Seven Opportunities for the UN in 2019-2020, Special Briefing N°2, 12 September 2019.

Seven Priorities for the New EU High Representative, Special Briefing N°3, 12 December 2019.

COVID-19 and Conflict: Seven Trends to Watch, Special Briefing N°4, 24 March 2020 (also available in French and Spanish).

A Course Correction for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, Special Briefing N°5, 9 December 2020.

Nineteen Conflict Prevention Tips for the Biden Administration, United States Briefing N°2, 28 January 2021.

Ten Challenges for the UN in 2021-2022, Special Briefing N°6, 13 September 2021.

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A Tale of Two Councils: Strengthening AU-UN Cooperation, Africa Report N°279, 25 June 2019.

The Price of Peace: Securing UN Financing for AU Peace Operations, Africa Report N°286, 31 January 2020.

Eight Priorities for the African Union in 2020, Africa Briefing N°151, 7 February 2020 (also available in French).

How to Spend It: New EU Funding for African Peace and Security, Africa Report N°297, 14 January 2021 (also available in French).

Eight Priorities for the African Union in 2021, Africa Briefing N°166, 3 February 2021 (also available in French).

Central Africa

Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: How to Get to Talks?, Africa Report N°272, 2 May 2019 (also available in French).

Chad: Avoiding Confrontation in Miski, Africa Report N°274, 17 May 2019 (only available in French).

Making the Central African Republic's Latest Peace Agreement Stick, Africa Report N°277, 18 June 2019 (also available in French).

Running Out of Options in Burundi, Africa Report N°278, 20 June 2019 (also available in French).

A New Approach for the UN to Stabilise the DR Congo, Africa Briefing N°148, 4 December 2019.

Avoiding the Resurgence of Inter-communal Violence in Eastern Chad, Africa Report N°284, 30 December 2019 (also available in French).

Averting Proxy Wars in the Eastern DR Congo and Great Lakes, Africa Briefing N°150, 23 January 2020 (also available in French and Portuguese).

A First Step Toward Reform: Ending Burundi's Forced Contribution System, Africa Briefing N°153, 8 April 2020 (also available in French).

Mineral Concessions: Avoiding Conflict in DR Congo's Mining Heartland, Africa Report N°290, 30 June 2020 (also available in French).

DR Congo: Ending the Cycle of Violence in Ituri, Africa Report N°292, 15 July 2020 (also available in French).

Easing Cameroon's Ethno-political Tensions, On and Offline, Africa Report N°295, 3 December 2020 (also available in French).

Réduire les tensions électorales en République centrafricaine, Africa Report N°296, 10 December 2020 (only available in French).

New Challenges for Chad's Army, Africa Report N°298, 22 janvier 2021 (only available in French).

Horn of Africa

Improving Prospects for a Peaceful Transition in Sudan, Africa Briefing N°143, 14 January 2019.

Managing Ethiopia's Unsettled Transition, Africa Report N°269, 21 February 2019.

Salvaging South Sudan's Fragile Peace Deal, Africa Report N°270, 13 March 2019.

Bridging the Gap in the Nile Waters Dispute, Africa Report N°271, 20 March 2019.

Averting Violence in Zanzibar's Knife-edge Election, Africa Briefing N°144, 11 June 2019.

Women and Al-Shabaab's Insurgency, Africa Briefing N°145, 27 June 2019.

Time for Ethiopia to Bargain with Sidama over Statehood, Africa Briefing N°146, 4 July 2019.

Somalia-Somaliland: The Perils of Delaying New Talks, Africa Report N°280, 12 July 2019.

Safeguarding Sudan's Revolution, Africa Report N°281, 21 October 2019.

Déjà Vu: Preventing Another Collapse in South Sudan, Africa Briefing N°147, 4 November 2019.

Keeping Ethiopia's Transition on the Rails, Africa Report N°283, 16 December 2019.

COVID-19 in Somalia: A Public Health Emergency in an Electoral Minefield, Africa Briefing N°155, 8 May 2020.

Bridging the Divide in Ethiopia's North, Africa Briefing N°156, 12 June 2020.

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Blunting Al-Shabaab's Impact on Somalia's Elections, Africa Briefing N°165, 31 December 2020.

Toward a Viable Future for South Sudan, Africa Report N°300, 5 February 2021.

Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region, Africa Briefing N°167, 11 February 2021.

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Four Conflict Prevention Opportunities for South Africa's Foreign Policy, Africa Briefing N°152, 27 March 2020.

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Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province, Africa Report N°273, 16 May 2019.

Returning from the Land of Jihad: The Fate of Women Associated with Boko Haram, Africa Report N°275, 21 May 2019.

Speaking with the "Bad Guys": Toward Dialogue with Central Mali's Jihadists, Africa Report N°276 (also available in French), 28 May 2019.

Getting a Grip on Central Sahel's Gold Rush, Africa Report N°282, 13 November 2019 (also available in French).

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Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem, Africa Report N°288, 18 May 2020.

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A Course Correction for the Sahel Stabilisation Strategy, Africa Report N°299, 1 February 2021 (also available in French).

An Exit from Boko Haram? Assessing Nigeria's Operation Safe Corridor, Africa Briefing N°170, 19 March 2021.

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