
The African Union's Role in Promoting Peace, Security and Stability: From Reaction to Prevention?

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Introduction

This document provides a summary of a meeting and question-and-answer session held at Chatham House on 15 October 2014, which examined the current and future role of the African Union (AU) in Africa.

The AU aims to end armed conflict in Africa by 2020, so, despite a wide-ranging agenda to build towards a 'peaceful, integrated and prosperous Africa' by 2063, peace and security remain a current key priority in the work of the AU Commission. The AU is trying to move beyond crisis management to conflict prevention, but continues to be faced with challenges such as a lack of clarity on AU intervention mandates and roles, issues of internal harmonization, and competition and poor coordination between member states.

At this meeting, Ambassador Chergui set out his priorities as AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, and how he works towards these priorities with counterparts within and outside the AU Commission. He discussed the AU's continuing role in furthering integration towards peace and security on the continent, and how external partners can support this.

The meeting was held on the record. The following summary is intended to serve as an aide-memoire for those who took part, and to provide a general summary of discussions for those who did not.

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Ambassador Smaïl Chergui

Ambassador Chergui began his presentation by emphasizing that the African narrative is not limited to peace and security issues. Rather, Africa is scaling new heights in terms of economic development; art and culture are flourishing; education is expanding; trade is increasing with countries both inside and outside the continent; human rights are improving; and the number of democratic states is rising.

The speaker described the problems that faced the predecessor to the AU, the Organization of African Unity (OAU). He said that during the 39 years of its existence, the OAU had a reputation for reacting to conflict rather than anticipating it. Most measures implemented by the OAU were ineffective and one-sided, and suffered as a result of its uncoordinated structure. In addition, its efforts were not supported by any frameworks for conflict prevention, and Africa did not have the collective vision and will necessary to implement effective forward-thinking, continent-wide policy.

The reasons for these failures of the OAU were in part a result of a lack of sovereignty experienced by African states in the early post-colonial era. Ambassador Chergui argued that the newly independent states were fragile and weak, and still subject to the whims of their former colonial masters. Countries gained political independence but, crucially, not economic independence, and had little say in the international arena beyond their region. Implementation of a coherent, continent-wide strategy for conflict prevention was beyond the capacity of any coalition of African nations for much of the post-independence era. In 1993 the Cairo Declaration gave OAU states a legal mechanism for conflict resolution. However, it was unable to deliver, and an absence of early warning systems facilitated atrocities such as the Rwandan genocide.

Ambassador Chergui explained that the realization that the African condition could not be ameliorated by a business-as-usual approach led to the founding of the AU and a new African Peace and Security

Architecture (APSA). A holistic approach to anticipating crises and conflicts was put into place. A new Peace and Security Council (PSC) was created and supported by the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) and the African Standby Force (ASF). Ambassador Chergui said that since the formation of APSA, Africans have led missions in Somalia, Mali, Darfur and the Central African Republic (CAR), while capacity building and outreach programmes have proved much more effective than did previous efforts. In addition, the Panel of the Wise (PoW), a high-level mediation panel and consultative body of the AU, has coordinated reconciliation processes in Liberia, Somalia, Guinea-Bissau, Comoros and Côte d'Ivoire. The AU also established the Regional Cooperation Initiative (RCI) to coordinate the operationalization of the ASF, and to improve the African capacity for an immediate response to emergency situations. Ambassador Chergui stated that the AU is working closely with the UN to evolve their partnership and improve this capacity even further.

Despite the successes of the new approach, he questioned whether these processes could remain cost-effective and sustainable in an environment in which economic resources are decreasing and there is an increasing reliance on single donors. He said that it was important for the AU to find alternative sources of funding both to ensure neutrality and to maintain its operational capacity. It is also important that Africa's governance architecture is bolstered to address the root causes of conflict, including both infrastructural capacity and willingness to tackle issues such as human rights abuses. He described how the newly established African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) can help put pressure on governments to achieve these goals. The APRM is a powerful tool that evaluates member states on their successes and failures in a wide range of areas. Under the APRM, leaders submit themselves to public scrutiny and peer review. Currently, 38 African states have voluntarily signed up to this process.

Ambassador Chergui said that the AU is attempting to coordinate a long-term vision for the future through Agenda 2063, a 50-year strategic action plan which is intended to be implemented by mid-2015. By the end of its life cycle, the Agenda aims to ensure that peace and security are maintained, that institutional infrastructure is improved to normalize effective oversight, and that there is a fully functional peace and security architecture made up of African forces. Ambassador Chergui said that through using the recently established peace and security mechanisms of the AU, the ultimate goal of the Agenda is to eliminate the causes and necessity of all violent conflict on the continent.

Summary of Questions and Answers

Questions

How can you expect a smooth development of these plans in the context of a globalized world when the powers on the UN Security Council influence Africa but Africa is without representation on the Security Council?

What is the AU's plan for operations in Somalia beyond 2016?

In practical terms, what is the current state of the ASF?

How does the AU use regional organizations in its operations?

Ambassador Smail Chergui

Ambassador Chergui stated that there is a growing respect for the AU on the part of the international community, and especially among Security Council members. As long as the AU continues to focus on

basic values such as human rights, equality and democracy, it will become more influential internationally. Ambassador Chergui said that cooperation with AU member states is increasingly being sought, and that the organization has excellent partnerships with the largest and wealthiest nations in the world. He noted that it is important for the AU to prove that it is competent, and the current operation in Somalia, where there have been huge gains against Al-Shabaab, is helping to convince the international community that the AU is capable of successfully managing complex projects. He also noted that African soldiers were decisive in tackling the M23 rebel group in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. According to Ambassador Chergui, further demonstrations that the APSA is having a positive impact will continue to increase the AU's standing on the world stage.

Ambassador Chergui said that while the AU is following the political process in Somalia very carefully, it will not withdraw entirely from the country after 2016. He noted that the success of any eventual exit strategy from the country is dependent on the ability of Somalia's national security forces to maintain stability. Thus, the training of Somalia's armed forces and police, the capacity of both of which is constantly improving, is an integral part of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Ambassador Chergui also said that once the situation in Somalia is more stable, the process of disarmament of the population will gather pace and contribute to the overall recovery.

It is hoped that the ASF will be operational by the end of 2015, including its rapid deployment capability. Ambassador Chergui stated that there are 15 nations contributing voluntarily to the force, with participation self-financed for a deployment of up to a month. The AU was currently preparing for a command exercise that was due to take place in Tanzania at the end of October 2014.

Ambassador Chergui explained that making use of regional organizations such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in South Sudan and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) in the CAR is always the first stage of action taken by the AU. He said that the AU is seeking to strengthen these existing regional groupings in order to make continental integration easier, and to ensure that solutions to conflicts and crises are more durable and effective.

Questions

Will the increased US military presence in Africa lead to a greater prevalence of terrorism on the continent? What is the AU's strategy if terrorism does increase?

NATO and the AU have similar goals for the continent. Do you see increased partnership between the two organizations in the coming years?

What is the progress on alternative financial mechanisms?

What is the AU's position on changes to limits on presidential mandate terms?

Ambassador Smail Chergui

In Ambassador Chergui's view, the US strategy in Africa is not problematic, and has no relation to terrorism on the continent. He said that the AU is meeting terrorist threats with localized strategies – for example, AMISOM countering al-Shabaab and a dedicated force dealing with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). He stated that the AU has established an effective communications system for member states to use when countering terrorists in order to coordinate responses continent-wide. He said the perception that Africa is increasingly plagued by terrorism is largely attributable to the high profile of Boko Haram.

Although the Nigerian army was not trained to counteract the threat of the group, it has adapted over time in terms of both strategy and equipment. Ambassador Chergui said that the international community is providing assistance to Nigeria in the form of training, military equipment and intelligence. However, he emphasized that this by itself will not be enough to eliminate terrorism. The AU has identified action areas to target the grass-roots causes of the problem, at the forefront of which is the education of women in order to undo the effects of the terrorists' propaganda.

Ambassador Chergui said that any future cooperation between the AU and NATO may have been made less likely by NATO's involvement in Libya during the Arab Spring. African states were denied any influence over NATO's campaign, and many African leaders were offended by this perceived lack of respect for African sovereignty. However, he stated that the AU's relationship with NATO has not completely deteriorated, and any partnership that benefits African interests should not be discounted.

Alternative sources of funding are an issue that dominates almost every AU summit. According to Ambassador Chergui, many AU members consider it unacceptable that most of the AU's budget continues to depend on the support of its partners. As such, African solutions to African problems continue to be a priority for the organization. The AU continues to work hard to try to find avenues through which progress towards self-sustainability can be made.

Although changes to presidential terms in some African countries have been a concern to the AU, if the process comes about through a legal framework then there is little the AU can do in response. Where there is a legal basis for the change, members of the PoW are dispatched to relevant countries to attempt to undertake a national dialogue and try to prevent violence. Sanctions are also possible in some situations. Ambassador Chergui said that the AU is receiving additional help in these matters from the EU and other international bodies.