

Lessons from African Peacemaking

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Introduction and purpose

Much has been made of the mantra of 'African solutions to African problems'. This paper undertakes three brief case studies of crises in Côte d'Ivoire, Libya and Mali, to understand the extent to which: regional and sub-regional organisations in Africa have managed to mount a united front in response to these crises; Africans have been at the forefront of mediation efforts and how effective these efforts have been; and, finally, how Africa has deployed peace support operations to protect civilians.

Among other conclusions, the paper ends by identifying an increasing need for greater integration and coordination between African and international mediation and peacemaking efforts. This is particularly true for the African Union's Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) who are the main actors in African conflict prevention and management. In addition, the case studies indicate that, despite manifest progress in the area of mediation where several interventions have paved the way for political settlements, Africa still has limited capacity to lead peacekeeping operations. The paper argues for the further strengthening of the comparative advantage which the AU has built over the last decade in managing peacekeeping operations.

Case study one: Côte d'Ivoire

Many structural factors underlie the political conflict in Côte d'Ivoire including the instrumentalisation of citizenship; the north/south divide; cocoa land and farming rights; competition between landowners and migrant workers; and the impact of economic cycles, particularly the price of cocoa.

The most recent crisis has its roots in Henri Konan Bédié's efforts to exclude his northern rival, Alassane Ouattara, from running against him in the controversial 1995 elections. Bédié only won by clamping down on opposition whilst emphasising the concept of Ivority. Relations among various ethnic groups, as well as within the army, became strained in the aftermath of the elections and, in late 1999, General Robert Guéï seized power. Despite violent protests, Ouattara was disqualified from participating in the subsequent elections in October 2000 due to his alleged Burkinabé nationality and Laurent Gbagbo replaced Guéï. Guéï was, in turn, killed during a failed armed uprising in September 2002 that left the country divided.

The country was only stabilised after intervention by French troops (Operation Unicorn), although warlords and fighters from Liberia and Sierra Leone occupied parts of the west. The Accra and Linas-Marcoussis Agreements (facilitated respectively by ECOWAS and France with the blessing of the AU and the United Nations) yielded a government of national reconciliation.¹ ECOWAS subsequently deployed the ECOWAS

¹ The signatories were President Laurent Gbagbo; Prime Minister Seydou Elimane Diarra; the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI); the Ivorian Worker's Party (PTI); the Rally For The Republicans (RDR); the Union for Democracy and Peace in Ivory Coast (UDPCI); the Popular Movement of Ivory Coast (MPCI); the Popular Movement of the Great West (MPIGO); the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire - African Democratic Rally (PDCI-RDA); the Democratic and Citizenship Union (UDCY); and the Movement of the Forces of the Future (MFA).

Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (ECOMICI) to ensure that the ceasefire was respected. In November 2004, the government of national unity effectively collapsed despite the presence of ECOMICI and later UN peacekeepers (UNOCI).

The 2005 Pretoria agreement negotiated by former South African President Mbeki on behalf of the AU was an important African-brokered achievement.² It allowed the main opposition leader, Alassane Ouattara, to run for elections; it introduced the notion of certification into the electoral process; and contributed to solving important problems within the electoral commission.

However, President Gbagbo remained intransigent and the peace process again reached a deadlock when he rejected UNSC Resolution 1721 of 1 November, 2006 (which extended the transitional mandates of Gbagbo and Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny for no more than a year) on the grounds that it infringed on Ivorian law. On 4 March 2007, President Blaise Compaoré, acting on behalf of ECOWAS, brokered the Ouagadougou peace accord and the AU launched a number of subsequent mediation attempts to break the deadlock. Eventually, in February 2011 the AU set up the High Level Panel on the Resolution of the Crisis in Côte d'Ivoire – composed of Heads of State from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Tanzania and South Africa, and a High Representative for the implementation of the overall political solution.

The results from the November 2011 Presidential elections, certified by the United Nations Secretary-General (UN SG), showed that Gbagbo had lost, an announcement subsequently retracted and overturned by the electoral commission. The constitutional court, favourable to Gbagbo, announced different results. When Gbagbo was hastily sworn in, African regional organisations responded rapidly with suspension and targeted sanctions against him and his close allies including a travel ban and the freezing of financial assets. Africa was not united, however, and some countries outside the region acted individually.

In March 2011, civil war resumed between forces loyal to Gbagbo and Ouattara. On 30 March, UNSC Resolution 1975 – which reiterated that UNOCI could use “all necessary measures” in its mandate to protect civilians under imminent threat of attack – was strongly supported by ECOWAS (with some dissenting voices, even from within ECOWAS). Eventually, with military support from UN and French forces, Gbagbo was arrested at his residence and later deported to the ICC where he is currently standing trial for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In responding to the situation in Côte d'Ivoire, there was significant co-operation and complementarity between ECOWAS, the AU's PSC and the UN, although there was also considerable divergence in policy during the post-election period. A lack of coherence within ECOWAS weakened its strong rhetorical stance and presented mediators with obvious difficulties in terms of agreeing on the way forward. Clear differences about next steps also emerged within the AU as some countries (South Africa and Angola) took a contrasting position on the crisis to that of ECOWAS and the UN. Finally, the absence of respect for the agreements and undertakings reached by the signatories stymied the implementation of the peace agreements (Linas Marcousis, Pretoria, Accra I and II).

Although duly elected, President Ouattara's ascension to power required an external military intervention. It remains to be seen to what extent the current government will address the structural drivers of conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, and what role ECOWAS and the AU can play in the run-up to the 2015 elections.

2 The signatories were President Laurent Gbagbo; Prime Minister Seydou Diarra, representing the Government of National Reconciliation; former President Henri Konan Bédié, representing the Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI); former Prime Minister Alassane Dramane Ouattara, representing the Rassemblement de Républicains (RDR); and Minister of State Guillaume Soro, Secretary General of the New Forces.

Case study two: Libya

On 1 September 1969, a small group of officers led by 27-year old army officer Muammar Gaddafi, overthrew the King and launched the Libyan Revolution which effectively concentrated all power (and much of the oil wealth) in the hands of Gaddafi. Touted as a form of direct democracy, no elections were held and any opposition was brutally suppressed. Apart from significant progress in education and infrastructure, Gaddafi used his country's enormous wealth to support armed groups in neighbouring countries and international terrorism, eventually leading to United Nations sanctions.

In February 2011, inspired by the Arab spring, popular protests against Gaddafi started in Benghazi (the former headquarters of the monarchy and known for its strong opposition to Gaddafi's regime). It soon spread westward to Tripoli, rapidly took a violent turn and received various forms of support from external actors. In response, Gaddafi's regime prepared a robust response to what it considered an Islamist and terrorist insurrection. But the brutal repression of popular protests by Gaddafi's security forces only increased the resolve of protestors, widened the geographic scope of the insurrection beyond the rebellious eastern part of the country, and resulted in widespread international condemnation. The UN expressed concern that the disproportionate use of force could amount to crimes against humanity. Gaddafi's intention to regain control of the eastern cities, especially Benghazi, by armed force eventually triggered rapid international mobilisation.

On 23 February 2011, a week after the Libyan uprising started, the AU PSC met in Addis Ababa. The PSC decided to immediately dispatch a fact-finding mission to Libya to assess the situation on the ground – a decision that was soon overtaken by events. On 26 February, the UNSC passed Resolution 1970, sending the signal that it would be in the lead regarding Libya. The PSC only reacted on 10 March, at which point it established an AU High-level Ad Hoc Committee on Libya comprised of five Heads of State and government, together with the Chairperson of the Commission, to facilitate an inclusive dialogue and to work with external partners towards an early resolution of the crisis.

In the meantime, events were unfolding rapidly, both in Libya as well as in the UN. On 17 March, UNSC Resolution 1973 was adopted and authorised the establishment of a no-fly zone and the use of "all means necessary" to protect civilians. Three African non-permanent members of the UNSC voted in favour of UNSC 1973 supported by the Arab League. At the time, many African countries appeared to be in favour of Resolution 1973. The establishment of the no-fly zone effectively disallowed the entry into Libyan airspace of the members of the High-level Ad Hoc Committee on Libya and their efforts were aborted.

After several months of NATO strikes (and clear efforts at unilaterally expanding the UNSC mandate in favour of regime change), rebel fighters entered Tripoli in August 2011. Gaddafi was killed in Sirte a few months later. During August 2012, the National Transitional Council that had run the country handed over power to an elected General National Congress, tasked with the formation of an interim government and the drafting of a constitution.

The conflict in Libya highlighted major differences in approaches to conflict resolution between the AU and the UN, as well as among AU Member States. At least three UNSC permanent members were determined to use this opportunity to effect regime change and were not willing to allow the AU (or anyone else for that matter) to thwart them in the process. The absence of an effective, functioning Regional Economic Community also prevented a more direct African involvement in the conflict while other actors – the UN and the Arab League, of which Libya is also a member – did not share the AU's approach.

No clear African position on the Libyan crisis was crafted to allow meaningful diplomatic intervention that would forestall a brutal recapture of Benghazi. In any case, neither the AU nor any of its members (with the possible exception of Egypt) had the military means with which they could have halted Gaddafi's march eastward. The AU Commission should, in retrospect, have moved much more quickly in the deployment of its fact-finding mission as well as the AU High-Level Ad Hoc committee, a problem

compounded by a clear lack of communication between African members of the UNSC in New York and the PSC in Addis Ababa and vice versa.

The AU's principled objection to the use of force, even in the face of planned mass killings, would subsequently raise questions about the interpretation of Article 4 (b and h) of the Constitutive Act which deal with the need for early responses to contain crisis situations and the right of the Union to intervene in a Member State.

Eventually the limited scope and depth of UN/NATO solutions (predicated, in retrospect, on the removal of Gaddafi) contributed to the current deterioration in the Sahel, where arms from Libya supply a multitude of armed groups whose actions continue to undermine state security. Here too, tensions and frictions between the AU and the UNSC prevented an international consensus. In the process, Libya highlighted the inability of the UN/international community to respond to complex post-Cold War security challenges using traditional tools of peacekeeping and peace enforcement when key UNSC members were intent on using the opportunity to make geo-strategic gains, thereby defeating the aim of collective security action in the common international interest.

Case study three: Mali

The rapid deterioration in 2011/12 in Mali, hitherto considered a democratic success story, reflects the apparent inability of the international community (including African institutions) to adequately monitor governance trends and anticipate their implications.

Unlike the situation in Libya, key actors (ECOWAS, the AU and the UN) were all deeply involved in the crisis that emerged in Mali early in 2012. In the period leading up to October 2013, ECOWAS met over 30 times at various levels (Heads of State and Government, ministerial and technical) to define a framework to restore the constitutional order and fight the Islamist armed groups. As for the AU PSC, it issued over 16 communiqués on the situation in Mali and the AU Commission organised several meetings focusing on various aspects (political, humanitarian and military) of the crisis. The UNSC remained seized of the situation as reflected in the number of resolutions (3) and the various reports of the Secretary-General.

To recap, in January 2012, shortly after a joint UN-AU mission in the Sahel to assess the situation in the region, an armed conflict broke out in northern Mali during which Tuareg rebels, supported by Islamic extremists, took control of the northern regions of Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal and declared the secession of a new state, Azawad. In March 2012, the conflict was complicated by an unexpected military coup which ousted President Amadou Toumani Touré a month before scheduled Presidential elections. Fighting between Tuareg and Islamist rebels complemented the picture of a country rapidly descending into chaos.

In the aftermath of the coup d'état, the AU PSC, suspended Mali from AU activities in accordance with its doctrine on unconstitutional changes of government. On 27 March, ECOWAS called an extraordinary meeting of Heads of State and Government with the aim of seeking the return to constitutional order, the implementation of a mediation process under the auspices of President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, and the activation of the ECOWAS standby brigade. On 6 April, the military junta and ECOWAS signed a framework agreement that led to the resignation of President Touré; the appointment of the Speaker of the National Assembly, Dioncounda Traoré, as interim President; and eventually to the establishment of a transitional Government, headed by an interim Prime Minister, Cheick Modibo Diarra. On 20 August, the Prime Minister announced the formation of a government of national unity.

Whereas ECOWAS managed to move quickly in appointing a mediation team and helping Mali to establish a transitional government, the activation of a military response to the crisis met with several challenges. ECOWAS Member States struggled to deploy committed and combat-ready troops as part of the ECOWAS Mission in Mali (MICEMA) and tensions were evident between ECOWAS and the UN.

MICEMA never went beyond the planning stages, having faced several obstacles including the junta's hostility to any armed presence in Bamako; the absence of consensus on the way forward with Algeria and, to a lesser extent, Mauritania, accentuated by the fact that these two countries do not belong to ECOWAS; and logistical and financial constraints that made it impossible to deploy troops in the absence of international support. The AU, which initially limited its efforts to supporting ECOWAS, was eventually able to unlock the problem. The AU moved the planned operation from MICEMA to a continental level, bringing the Malian army on board and seeking to overcome Algeria's reluctance. It transformed MICEMA into the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) which the UNSC authorised for an initial period of one year and which was due to be operational by September 2013.

In the meantime, the absence of clear authority in Bamako enabled the rebels and jihadists to increase their hold on the northern part of the country. The jihadist groups took advantage of the unstable situation as well as the international community's hesitation and the inability of ECOWAS to respond militarily. They took control of northern Mali, marginalised their former Tuareg allies, and started a southward offensive to the more populated and strategic parts of the country. On 10 January 2013, twenty days after the UNSC adopted the resolution authorising the deployment of AFISMA, the armed groups launched their offensive on Kona. This called for urgent action because the Malian army, whose reorganisation by the EU had not yet started, couldn't respond effectively or in time. AFISMA, then still in the planning stages, could also not respond.

Eventually a French intervention, Operation Serval, halted the advance, regained control of the major northern cities and tracked the armed groups to their northern hideouts. The intervention was not meant as a long term solution, but aimed to address the urgent crisis. Hence the emergence, at France's initiative, of the idea of a UN mission with more secure funding to take over from AFISMA.

Although ECOWAS expressed its desire to lead international efforts, it was soon confronted by financial, capacity and logistical constraints. On 7 March 2013, the AU and ECOWAS expressed their support for the planned transformation of AFISMA into a UN operation but added a number of conditions, subsequently ignored by the UNSC, including calls from the AU to appoint an African to lead the UN operation. This, and other factors, led the AU PSC to issue a particularly sharp communiqué on 25 April 2013: "Council notes that the resolution does not take into account the concerns formally expressed by the AU and ECOWAS and the proposals they constructively made to facilitate a coordinated international support for the ongoing efforts by the Malian stakeholders."

On 25 April, the subsequent United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was established by UNSC Resolution 2100. It absorbed UNOM, undertook a number of security-related stabilisation tasks, prepared for elections and took over from AFISMA on 1 July.

The Preliminary Agreement for the Presidential Election and Inclusive Peace Talks was signed in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, on 18 June 2013. ECOWAS and the AU played a central role during the difficult negotiations that led to conclusion of the agreement. On 1 July 2013, the signing was followed by the transformation of the AFISMA into MINUSMA. Largely at the insistence of the USA, France and others, presidential and legislative elections were held in Mali in July and August 2013. They were won by Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, a former Prime Minister.

As in the Ivorian crisis, there appeared to be a degree of mutual suspicion and friction between ECOWAS, the AU and the UN which delayed the deployment of forces and stretched regional, continental and international conflict management and resolution mechanisms. It further exposed the gap between the the growing political will among African leaders and their limited capabilities in conflict resolution and management, despite several years of investment in a sophisticated peace and security architecture including the African Standby Force (ASF).

During the crisis the relationship between the AU and ECOWAS was marked by a lack of coordination and, at times, rivalry. Hence the need for a shared understanding of the principles underlying the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA); their effective implementation; and sustained dialogue between

the parties concerned. It is important to note that the largest African contribution to AFISMA came from Chad, a central African country. But the African armies with the best equipment and training to face the jihadist threat in the Sahel were either not from ECOWAS (Chad and Mauritania) or were not willing to get involved in an operation that they considered problematic (Algeria).

The crisis in Mali has also highlighted the gap between the rhetoric of prevention, which is at the heart of the objectives of the AU and ECOWAS, and the more limited practice of prevention. Before the eruption of the crisis, neither organisation had pointed to the increasingly glaring governance shortcomings in Mali as a major concern, nor taken steps to address them. While the AU had warned of the consequences of the Libyan crisis, it had failed to take the full measure of the fragility of the Malian state.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In the past decade, Africans have been providing greater leadership in conflict mediation and peacebuilding in Africa. This is particularly evident in Mali but also elsewhere. Steady progress is evident in the engagement of ECOWAS and the AU in African crises as well as in the collaboration between African bodies and the UNSC, although there is room for improvement. Competition between the UN, AU and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to lead on peacemaking (and even on peacekeeping) detracts from the efficacy of combined efforts. Therefore, clarifying these relationships and providing appropriate guidelines may be a useful subject for discussion in a special meeting between the UNSC and the PSC.

There is a need for greater integration and coordination between African and international mediation and peacemaking efforts. This would involve the AU PSC and the UNSC, for example, operating in a more streamlined manner, and without the suspicion and competition that has been evident in some contexts. This calls for a much more capable, activist and professional PSC, close and constant interaction between the AU and the UN, an improved AU liaison function in New York. The expansion of the UN office in Addis Ababa bodes well in this regard, but much more needs to be done. If the AU is serious about conflict mediation, it needs to invest in building the capacity of the Department of Political Affairs and other structures such as the Panel of the Wise. Decisions on who leads in which situation must be informed by available capabilities and not necessarily territorial jealousies. The AU also needs to ensure there is more effective coordination between the Commission, RECs and Member States.

The AU and Africa do not yet have the means to undertake, fund and sustain multidimensional peacekeeping operations. Efforts (by Africans) to push African solutions too robustly beyond commensurate resources delay responses and detract from progress. In all three case studies, countries outside Africa played a key role and demonstrated the lack of preparedness of the ASF, despite the substantial investments that have been made to operationalise it. Even when the AU offered to host and establish a peacekeeping mission in Mali, it soon emerged that it could not and the result was a UN mission.

In addition, African forces are not yet able to provide more than symbolic contributions to robust missions at short notice; lack force enablers such as strategic deployment capabilities; and are often largely dependent on the UN system (directly or through a hybrid arrangement). Whereas modest peacekeeping missions backed by the full weight and support of the UN system can afford to implement a mandate that includes the protection of civilians, African peacekeepers often deploy without appropriate equipment and responses are uncoordinated and sometimes ineffective. It may be opportune to recognise that the ambition of the ASF needs to be scaled back substantially (including that of its Rapid Deployment Capability or, more recently, the suggested African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises, ACIRC³).

3 See Assembly/AU/Dec.489(XXI), Decision on the Establishment of an African Capacity for Immediate response to Crises, 21st Ordinary session of the Assembly of the Union, 26-27th May 2013, Addis Ababa.

The AU's Peace Fund does not allow the AU and the regional mechanisms to finance and have full ownership of their operations. African actors must therefore find other viable sources of funding, including through assessed contributions, as provided for by the PSC Protocol.

Finally, while the capacity of the AU remains limited, at the sub-regional level it is even more constrained and efforts to coordinate peacekeeping and peacemaking at regional and sub-regional levels compound the shortcomings. While the support and legitimacy of sub-regional organisations is important, Africans may wish to consider focusing initially on building greater capacity at the continental level. Perhaps it would be preferable for the AU to assume the lead wherever possible, and for other bodies to accept its overall guidance and coordinating role. Coordination between the AU and sub-regional organisations is often haphazard (evident in other mediation efforts not examined here, such as Madagascar), which allows belligerents to exploit institutional divisions and inconsistencies.