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Africa's international borders as potential sources of conflict and future threats to peace and security

INTRODUCTION

After African states obtained their independence, the artificial and poorly demarcated borders of many countries were considered the most potent source of conflict and political instability. This resulted in heated debates on whether to revise or maintain the colonial borders. The argument split the academic community and policy-makers into two camps, the revisionists and the anti-revisionists.[2] However, the continent's pioneer integration organisation, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), elected for a status quo on borders to avert the likelihood of chaos and anarchy resulting from boundary contestations.

Despite the decisions of the OAU and its successor, the African Union (AU), border conflicts became a source of instability and conflict. Significantly, although intra-state conflicts seem to have replaced inter-state conflicts as the principal source of instability on the continent since the late 1980s, the prospect of destabilising border conflicts is still very real, particularly against the background of Africa's ever-expanding population, which is accompanied by shrinking economic resources and opportunities, and high levels of migration.

Africa's borders are very porous because of a lack of proper demarcation and delimitation. This has been identified as the principal reason for the ease with which governance-related national conflicts in individual states have spilled over to entire regions, as has been the case in the Great Lakes region, West Africa and the Horn of Africa. Significantly, many intra-state conflicts in Africa have been sparked by the forceful fusion of incompatible national groups into one state by the imposition of artificial boundaries by colonial powers.

The ongoing debate on the appropriate pace and direction of Africa's integration project, particularly the recent emphasis on the establishment of a continent-wide government, has revived concerns about the ramifications of the continent's borders for peace and security, raising it to the top of Africa's policy agenda. Some have argued that the devotion of material and human resources to the proper demarcation of the borders of Africa's sovereign states contradicts both the spirit and the letter of continental integration plans, on the grounds that regional or continental integration necessarily means the removal of borders. However, others have observed that for any meaningful and successful integration to occur, Africa's borders must be properly demarcated and defined first so that they are able to serve as bridges for integration, as opposed to being the barriers against integration they have been over the years.

Against this background, this paper examines the potential of Africa's international boundaries as causes of conflict and threats to peace and security. It argues that although border-related conflicts have been displaced by governance-related intra-state contests, Africa's poorly demarcated boundaries are still potent sources of inter-state conflict, particularly since porous boundaries serve as conduits by which intra-state conflicts spill over to Africa's regions. For this reason, the proper demarcation and control of Africa's borders is not only essential for achieving peace and security on the continent, but will also serve as a catalyst for the regional and continental integration agenda.

The next section will provide the analytical framework and establish the nexus between borders, state sovereignty and conflict. Thereafter an overview of past

and current inter-state border conflicts on the continent will be presented, followed by a discussion of the prevalence of governance-related intra-state conflicts in Africa and their regional spill-over effects. The manifestations and dynamics of the potential sources of Africa's future border-related conflicts will be presented before the conclusion.

BORDERS, STATE SOVEREIGNTY AND CONFLICT – THE INTERFACE

Like many other social science concepts, the notion of boundary or border has historically shifted in definition. However, it generally conveys a sense of imaginary or real lines that divide two pieces of land from one another. When these lines run between two national states, they are described as international boundaries and are usually defined from point to point in treaties, arbitration awards or the reports of boundary commissions.[3] From a legal perspective, international boundaries are the sharp edge of the territories within which states exercise their jurisdictions – the lines that mark the legal termination of the territory of one state or political unit and the start of another.[4]

Another defining characteristic of boundaries has been the changing nature of the functions they have performed throughout history, which has been a useful tool to illuminate the nature and pattern of interactions of different domestic and international systems.[5] In the modern state, well-defined borders are not only a key element of the definition of statehood, but their consolidation has been identified as one of three major factors essential for building stable states and societies, the others being the forming of state institutions and the creation of a national consciousness. Legitimate governmental objectives cannot be clarified or implemented unless the territory where such authority is to be exercised can be defined and understood. It is clear that all states are concerned with borders in their desire to extend their authority and functions of government over a specific territory. While unconsolidated borders, combined with ineffective political institutions and incomplete nationalist projects, have been recipes for instability and conflict, the establishment of more or less stable borders has been identified as a precondition for the building of stable governments and states.[6]

The primacy of well-defined and stable borders for state survival and inter-state relations is well set out in SE Finer's admonition: 'Tell a man today to go and build a state and he will try to establish a definite and defensible territorial boundary and compel those who live inside it to obey him.'[7] The centrality of borders is further underscored by Max Weber's popular dictum that for a state to be a true state it must claim 'the monopoly of legitimate use of physical force within a territory'.[8] It is noteworthy that no state can claim monopoly over any territory that it is not able to define and defend properly.

With regard specifically to the African state, the importance of boundaries is not in question. However, the borders of African states have had a consistently poor reputation. Like the African state itself, African boundaries have been described variously as 'arbitrary' and 'artificial' colonial constructs, imposed on unwilling and un-participating African peoples who have either suffered dearly from their impact, or simply ignored them.[9] Arguably, one of the key challenges of African boundaries has been their arbitrary colonial origin, alongside the fact that, despite their formal recognition and reification by African governing elites, they have remained porous, undefended and even un-defendable. Their rather haphazard demarcation resulted in the merger of disparate social groups into single polities that have tended to be highly unstable, fluid and even irrelevant in some cases.[10]

Moreover, since independence, Africa's boundaries have remained unconsolidated, resulting in the extension of state jurisdiction to border areas being frustrated and the formation of requisite state institutions being thwarted. Related to this, and deriving from it, is a weakened state capacity that has itself engendered social instability and conditions that have in many instances encouraged irredentism.[11] In fact, Africa's colonial borders have been a factor in the inability of many African states to institutionalise governmental efficiency and to engender meaningful national consolidation.

The discourse on the arbitrariness and ill-defined character of Africa's borders and the controversy over the associated policy of border status quo maintained by Africa's governing elite since the 1960s have been emotive and sentimental. The reality of the situation is that, on the one hand, it has been practically impossible to have sustainable stability and long-term peace and security within and among many African states and, on the other, the porous and unviable African borders have resulted in the regionalisation of instability and conflict, producing chaos and even anarchy in areas such as the Mano River in West Africa, the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa.[12] In fact, conflicts, including those related to borders, have continued to be among the major challenges facing the continent and stand out as the most serious obstacle to the attainment of the continent's liberation dreams of economic, social and political wellbeing for all of Africa's peoples. Aside from the instability that has characterised African boundaries, the neglect of border areas, especially when it comes to the provision of infrastructure and core state services, has been a contributory factor to the continent's slow pace of integration.

POST-INDEPENDENCE ATTITUDES AND THE MANAGEMENT OF AFRICA'S BORDER CHALLENGES

Africa's 53 sovereign states are divided by over 165 borders, making it one of the most bisected continents in the world.[13] The fragmentation of Africa's geographical, sociological and political space, and its implications for inter-state relations, has been the focus of emotive debates over the years, animated by two schools of thought – the revisionists and the anti-revisionists. The revisionists argue for the urgent reconstitution of Africa's inherited borders and state system to rid states of their sociological incongruity, make them more economically viable and help to resolve the multiple crises of legitimacy, identity, development and integration. As far as they are concerned, the post-colonial African state as a mode of organisation of African societies and communities will always be alien and will continue hopelessly to aspire to acquisition of the attributes of the classic Westphalia state system.

The revisionists argue further that because the post-colonial state was preceded by the truncation of the natural evolution of political institutions in pre-colonial Africa, it has continued to express itself in forms that are in great tension with the well-established and entrenched sociological realities on the ground. They conclude that the problematic nature of the structure of many African states, including their boundaries, institutions and governance, is most clearly reflected in the numerous inter and intra-state conflicts. The only solution, they argue, is to review Africa's colonial borders, as well as the state system this has produced.[14]

The anti-revisionists, on the other hand, argue strongly for the maintenance of the status quo, claiming a) that borders the world over are artificial and that the case for African exceptionalism is therefore weak, and b) that while African boundaries could indeed be arbitrary, they have actually had fewer deleterious consequences, have presented more opportunities for African peoples and have, in some cases, been a greater asset for state consolidation than the border revisionists have been willing to concede.[15] More crucially they argue that while it is true that Africa has suffered from its partitioned nature, the cost of any attempt to adjust the boundaries will far exceed what they see as the mere hypothetical benefits of doing so.[16]

Understandably, at the time countries were gaining their independence, the 'anti-revisionist' thesis was more appealing to both the departing colonialists and the emergent African leadership. This is reflected in the incorporation of the principle of the inviolability of national boundaries in the Charter of the OAU of 1963. Among its core principles were the protection of sovereignty, territorial integrity and the inalienable right to the independent existence of each member state.[17] Even so, African leaders recognised that their inherited borders would remain permanent factors of dissension and they therefore recognised the urgent need to develop guidelines for the peaceful resolution of disputes. Accordingly, during the First Ordinary Session of Heads of State and Government in Cairo in July 1964, the leaders adopted resolution AHG/Res.16(1) on the management of disputes among African states. This, inter alia –

- Solemnly reaffirmed the strict respect by all member states of the OAU for the principles laid down in paragraph 3 of Article III of the Charter of the OAU
- Solemnly declared that all member states pledge themselves to respect the borders existing on their achievement of national independence

It is noteworthy that the AU's principle on the inviolability of Africa's colonially inherited borders was given the stamp of approval by the United Nations (UN), even though it contradicted its popular slogan relating to the right to self-determination for all peoples of the world.

Although the policy of territorial status quo resulted from African leaders' legitimate fear of opening a Pandora's box of territorial claims and possible anarchy on the continent, the expectation that by keeping the box closed unconditionally the potential difficulties would wither away, has remained an illusion. Africa's colonial boundaries have continued to manifest a disturbing lack of homogeneity and functional polities in certain states, and, rather than contributing to peaceful relations, have remained a major source of inter-state conflict, apart from fostering the regionalisation of intra-state conflict.

The fragmentation of Africa's geographical, sociological and political space ... has been the focus of emotive debates

A number of African countries have at different times since independence been in conflict with each other over common boundaries. These conflicts have revolved around issues of trans-boundary minorities, trans-boundary resources, unclear frontiers, and the contestation or difficulty of implementing existing colonial and post-colonial boundary agreements.[18] Between the late 1950s and the late 1990s, more than half of Africa's states have been involved in some form of boundary-related conflict. While some of these conflicts were resolved speedily through

Table 1 Some African boundary conflicts (1950 to 2000)

Conflicting parties	Conflict period	Trans-boundary minority	Trans-boundary resources	Frontier/ decolonisation	Agreement implementation	Status in 1997
Ethiopia/Somalia	1950–61; 1963–77; 1977–78	+	+	+	+	Managed in 1964, 1967 and 1968
Cameroon/ Nigeria	1963– 2002	+	+	–	–	Agreement in 1976; ICJ award in 2002. Effectively ceded by Nigeria in 2008
Algeria/Tunisia	1961–1970	–	+	+	–	Agreement in 1970
Algeria/Morocco	1962–1970	–	+	+	–	Agreement in 1970
Ethiopia/Kenya	1963–1970	–/+	–/+	+/+	–/–	Agreement in 1970
Côte d'Ivoire/ Liberia	1960–1961	+	–	+	–	Agreement in 1961
Mali/ Mauritania	1960–1963	+	+	–	+	Agreement in 1963
Chad/Libya	1935–1994	+	+	+	–	ICJ award in 1994
Guinea Bissau/ Senegal	1980–1992	–	+	+	–	ICJ award in 1992 (referred by the UK)
Dahomey/ Bissau/Niger	1963–1965	–	–	+	–	Agreement in 1965
Kenya/Somalia	1962–1984	+	–	+	+	Agreement in 1984
Tunisia/Libya	1990–1994	–	+	+	+	ICJ award in 1994
Malawi/Tanzania	1967–	–	–	–	+	No agreement/ not active
Mali/Burkina Faso	1963; 1974–75; 1985–86	+	+	+	+	No agreement/ not active
Ghana/Upper Volta/Burkina Faso	1964–66	–	–	?	–	No agreement/ not active
Equatorial Guinea/Gabon	1972	–	–	–	–	Colonial agreement/ not active
Ethiopia/ Eritrea	1952–1992; 1998–date	–	–	+	+	Changes: state formation/ active

Key to table: (+) indicates the presence of a major conflict issue, (++) the very strong presence of a major conflict issue, (–) the absence of a major conflict issue, and (-/+) a greater or lesser presence of a major border issue.

Source Extracted from Table 2 in Kjell-Ake Nordquist, Boundary conflicts and preventive diplomacy, 4–6. Available at http://www.Wilsoncenter.org/subsites/ccpdc/pubs/zart/ch2.htm (accessed 15 April 2010).

bilateral negotiations or third-party facilitation (Côte d'Ivoire–Liberia 1960/1961, Mali–Mauritania 1960/1963 and Dahomey–Bissau–Niger 1963/1965), others were very protracted, e.g. Ethiopia–Somalia (1950 to 1978 and beyond) and Cameroon–Nigeria (1963 to 2002).

Although some of these conflicts were resolved through sub-regional and regional mediation efforts, others could only be resolved after referral to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). There have been four major cases in this regard, including the Tunisia–Libya boundary dispute that received an ICJ ruling in 1994, the Guinea Bissau–Senegal border conflict that was brought to an end by an ICJ ruling in 1992, the Libya–Chad claims over the Auzou Stripe, which was only brought to closure by an ICJ verdict in 1994, and the Cameroon–Nigeria border conflict that was settled by a 2002 ICJ verdict. Table 1 summarises some of Africa's trans-border conflicts from the late 1950s to 2000.

The information in the table suggests that there was a prevalence of border-related inter-state conflicts in Africa in particularly the first 15 years after independence. And although the incidence of inter-state border conflicts decreased considerably thereafter, particularly from the late 1980s onward, Africa's borders have continued to pose serious challenges. As a result, the management of boundary problems has been a central issue in policy-making circles at both regional and continental levels. This has resulted in numerous border management proposals and resolutions.

Against the background of protracted border conflicts between Nigeria and some of its neighbours, and in particular the recurrent violent clashes between its security forces and Cameroonian gendarmes over their common maritime boundary, Nigeria proposed the establishment of an OAU Boundaries Commission at the 37th Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers in Nairobi, Kenya, in June 1981. The proposal was aimed at evolving a framework that would permit the technical management of all Africa's border problems with as little political interference as possible.[19] The proposal was referred to an ad hoc ministerial committee that had been mandated to study an earlier proposal by Sierra Leone for the establishment of a Political Security Council.[20] The Secretary-General of the OAU was directed specifically to obtain the views of member states on the establishment of a Boundaries Commission.

The ministerial committee subsequently recommended that a Boundaries Commission should be established as a technical subsidiary organ of the proposed Security Council, or alternatively that it should be made one of its permanent committees.[21] However, the mandate of the ad hoc committee was abruptly terminated by the 41st Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers on the grounds that prevailing circumstances on the continent did not permit the establishment of a Political Security Council. Since the establishment of a Boundaries Commission had been linked to the establishment of a Political Security Council, the Boundaries Commission idea died with the ministerial committee.[22]

Despite this failure, African leaders continued to indicate concern about the implications of the continent's arbitrary and poorly demarcated borders. They maintained that the struggle for the liberation of the continent from colonialism and its after-effects, and the establishment of an atmosphere of peace, security, and economic and social progress, was attainable only by the elimination of the causes of border tensions. This mood was reflected by the adoption of peace and security resolution CM/Res.1069(XLIV) by the Council of Ministers at the 44th Ordinary Session in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in July 1986. The Council of Ministers, inter alia –

- Reaffirmed its adherence to the principle of peaceful settlement of border conflicts between states
- Reaffirmed the support of African peoples and countries for Resolution AHG/Res.16(I) of July 1964
- Encouraged member states to undertake or pursue bilateral negotiations with a view to demarcating and effectively delineating their common borders[23]

In June 1991, Nigeria re-introduced a revised and more elaborate proposal for the establishment of an OAU Boundaries Commission at the 54th Ordinary Session of the OAU Council of Ministers in Abuja, Nigeria.[24] This proposal included recommendations for the establishment of national boundaries commissions by individual OAU members and of regional commissions by Regional Economic Communities (RECs). Although Nigeria registered little success with this proposal, it eventually succeeded in inserting elements of the proposal into one of the signature structures it introduced into the OAU, namely the Council on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CCSDCA). The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the CSSDCA, adopted by the OAU Assembly in Durban in July 2002, recognised the fact that border problems continued to threaten the prospects of peace and security on the continent and contained specific provisions for addressing border questions. In particular, the MoU provided for the delineation and demarcation of inter-African borders by 2012.

For its part, the AU has upheld the principle of the inviolability of African borders as evidenced in Article 4(b) of its Constitutive Act. Other cardinal objectives include the achievement of greater unity and solidarity among African countries and peoples, the acceleration of the political and socio-economic integration of the continent, and the promotion of peace, security and stability. However, it is

clear that these noble objectives will remain pipe dreams unless Africa succeeds in properly demarcating its borders and transforming border areas from being a source of inter-state conflict.

AFRICA'S GOVERNANCE-RELATED INTRA-STATE CONFLICTS AND THEIR REGIONAL SPILL-OVER EFFECTS

The end of the Cold War ushered in an environment that was supposedly more conducive to freedom of expression, particularly for peoples that had hitherto been constrained by oppressive governments. The winds of change of the 1990s brought with them the unblocking of channels of political expression, growth in the means of political organisation and the empowerment of opposition forces engaged in struggles against regimes.[25] For the average African state, composed of several seemingly incompatible nationalities, forcefully held together by imposed colonial boundaries and autocratic governments, the advent of democratisation provided the impetus for various marginalised groups to begin to seek redress, which included demands for separate statehood. Growing perceptions of exclusion and other forms of injustice readily aggregated and contributed to the strengthening of sub-national consciousness and primordial loyalties, which emerged as one of the most peace-threatening factors on the continent.[26]

The nature of conflict on the continent evolved, moving away from the prevalence of border-related inter-state conflicts to the proliferation of governance-related intra-state conflicts. Available evidence seems to suggest that many of Africa's recent conflicts have resulted from the inability of governments to accommodate and reconcile effectively the national, political, economic and socio-cultural contradictions in their polities. More significantly, because of the porous nature of Africa's borders and the underdeveloped character of Africa's borderlands, domestic conflicts readily spilled over to neighbouring states and destabilised whole regions in what has become known as the regionalisation of conflict in Africa.

It is worth noting that the poor state of development of border areas poses two major challenges. Firstly, a lack of physical infrastructure has tended to serve as a major impediment to both national and regional integration processes, with interactions and exchanges among border peoples and businesses being essentially informal. Secondly, because of the glaring neglect of border areas, they are particularly vulnerable to criminality and serve as sanctuaries for armed insurgents and even terrorist groups. Areas along borders thus readily transmit inter-state conflict to other parts of a region, as was the case in the Great Lakes region, where war engulfed Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and also involved other neighbouring countries in a conflict that became popularly known as 'Africa's world war'. This was also the case in the Liberian war that spread to Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire; the Sudanese civil war that has had destabilising effects on the Republic of Chad, the Central African Republic and the Republic of the Congo; and the collapse of the Somali state that has destabilised the entire Horn of Africa.

Although a detailed analysis of these conflicts is beyond the scope of this paper, it is useful to examine briefly the dynamics of three of these governance-related conflicts to demonstrate how readily they spilled over porous borders to become a threat to regional peace and security.

The DRC and the Great Lakes conflict

The Great Lakes region, including the eastern part of the vast territory that is today the DRC, has been one of Africa's most unstable and insecure regions. This instability has its origins in a multiplicity of factors, including the colonial legacy of arbitrary borders, and unviable states on the one hand and poorly managed politics and governance in the post-independence years on the other. While the DRC is one of Africa's larger and potentially more viable states, the neighbouring states of Rwanda and Burundi are tiny pieces of territory that are hardly viable economically. Moreover, colonial machinations resulted in the blind fusion of two seemingly incompatible 'nations', the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups, into the territories of both states. The fact that elements of these groups are also found across their borders in a number of other states in the region, including the DRC, has tended to complicate the security situation and facilitate the regionalisation of the conflicts.

The scarcity of resources and the poor management of Hutu-Tutsi relations in both Rwanda and Burundi laid the foundation for the perpetration of structural violence that subsequently led directly to the 1994 massacre in Rwanda. In addition, the turbulent nature of the Belgian Congo's independence struggle, together with inept and kleptocratic post-independence leadership in what was then known as Zaire, left that state weak and unable to establish control over its national territory beyond the capital, Kinshasa, and a few major towns. In light of the vastness of the country's territory and its huge resource endowments, its poorly controlled national borders have exposed it to widespread incursion and conflicts in neighbouring states.

In 1996 and 1998 the DRC was plunged into two successive wars following the genocide in Rwanda that drew in the entire Great Lakes region. A ceasefire agreement concluded in Lusaka, Zambia, in July 1999 was followed by UN Security Council Resolution 1258 of 6 August 1999 authorising the deployment of a UN Mission

in the Congo (MONUC). Despite the size of MONUC and notwithstanding ongoing international support for the peace processes in the DRC, including the huge resources expended on the elections in 2006, the country has been unable to fully extricate itself from the legacy of conflict.

The significance of the wars in the DRC to the discussion on the implications of Africa's borders on peace and security lies in the ease with which domestic conflict can be regionalised by the porous nature of borders and the ethnic composition of border peoples. This is borne out by looking at some of the states that became involved in the Congo wars. To begin with, Rwanda, the most prominent 'meddler' in the DRC's protracted problems, has tended to explain its incursion into the DRC as an effort to uproot the perpetrators of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, who took refuge in the eastern part of the DRC. Rwanda has consistently advanced this argument, although available evidence suggests that its motives for invading the DRC go beyond the quest for peace and security to include a desire to continue to benefit illegally from the eastern DRC's abundant mineral resources. It is noteworthy that the DRC's other small neighbour, Burundi, advanced a similar argument, namely the curbing of incursions by DRC-based Hutu extremists, as justification for its limited but telling military involvement.[27]

As for Angola, its 2 511km-long common border with the DRC automatically made it an interested party in the DRC. Angola's interest in having a friendly regime in Kinshasa capable of stabilising the country partly derived from its own internal dynamics, defined especially by the activities of the then Angolan rebel movements. This included in particular Jonas Savimbi's *Nião Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA) movement, which was able to use the unstable DRC as a beachhead against the government in Luanda. In addition, a portion of Angola's most strategic mineral zone, namely the oil-rich area stretching from north-west Angola to the Angolan enclave of Cabinda, is partitioned by a slice of Congolese territory, which is one of the strangest surviving colonial boundary arrangements on the continent. Understandably, the occupation by Congolese rebels of the Atlantic region of the DRC was perceived as a direct threat to Angola's industrial and commercial interests, especially against the backdrop of alleged collaboration between the Congolese rebels and UNITA. Angola's official motive for intervention in the DRC was to secure its strategic borders by stabilising its neighbour.

The Horn of Africa: dynamics of regional politics and the regionalisation of conflict

For several decades the Horn of Africa has been the site of Africa's most endemic inter- and intra-state conflict, producing some of Africa's most 'complex emergencies'.[28] Although almost all the conflicts that have occurred in the region have been primarily of internal origin, they have been amplified by a pattern of regional states intervening and meddling in each other's domestic politics. Various governments of Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti, Sudan and Eritrea have faced serious crises of legitimacy, and this has produced a complex web of domestic political tensions that have been transmitted readily acrossfluid inter-state boundaries. As a matter of fact, states of the region have attempted to deal with their respective internal political and security challenges by soliciting and securing support from insurgents and other disgruntled groups in neighbouring states.[29] The porous nature of the Horn of Africa's borders has not only contributed to the free movement of the huge numbers of refugees produced by various internal and inter-state conflicts, but has also facilitated the easy movement of weapons, combatants and bandits throughout the region.[30]

The Horn of Africa has produced some of Africa's most 'complex emergencies'

The Horn of Africa has experienced a peculiar pattern of state formation, quite distinct from state building processes in the rest of the continent. Rather than states and boundaries being the exclusive result of European imperialism as elsewhere on the continent, in the Horn region Ethiopia has played a major role in shaping state borders and has therefore tended to be perceived as a colonial and expansionist state by some of its neighbours. This has had far-reaching implications on inter-state relations in general and border relations in particular.[31] Ethiopia's history of territorial conquest and its ability to diplomatically manoeuvre European colonial powers and the United States saw it take control of the predominantly Somali-inhabited Haud and Ogaden regions in 1948, and also resulted in Eritrea becoming a federated territory of Ethiopia in 1952. Ten years later Ethiopia was perceived to have violated the terms of the federal arrangement with Eritrea by unilaterally making the territory one of its provinces with little autonomy. This resulted in a 32-year war of independence, which was only brought to an end in 1993 with a referendum that culminated in Eritrea's independence. Overall, Ethiopia's stature as a 'black imperial state'[32] has left a legacy of complicated border relations in the region, even casting doubt on the viability of the continent's norm of territorial status quo.[33]

More significantly, inter-state relations in the Horn have been affected by notions of a 'Greater Somalia' and a

'Greater Tigray', promoted by Somalia and Ethiopia respectively. Apart from Somalia's historical claim over the Somali-inhabited Haud and Ogaden regions of Ethiopia, Somalia has since independence made the unification of all Somalis in a Greater Somalia the central aim of the Somali state. Not only is this policy at variance with the national interests of neighbouring states that have Somali populations, e.g. Ethiopia and Kenya, it is also out of tune with the continent's policy of border status quo.[34] With regard to that part of Ethiopia inhabited by peoples of Somali origin, Somalia has argued over the years that in the light of its perception of Ethiopia as a colonising state, the principle of territorial integrity should not apply to territory colonised by Ethiopia. Put differently, the principle of territorial integrity should only be applicable to sovereign states and not to colonising ones, suggesting that Somalia's claim over Haud and Ogaden amounts to a continuation of the struggle for decolonisation, rather than a boundary review. This position has resulted in wars between Ethiopia and Somalia from 1977 to 1978 and 1987 to 1989, and partly explains Ethiopia's intervention in Somalia in recent years.

On the other hand, Ethiopia's notion of a Greater Tigray is a key explanation for its unilateral alteration of the terms of the UN-backed federal arrangement with Eritrea, under which the latter had enjoyed much autonomy, by reducing it to an ordinary province of Ethiopia in 1962. Perceptions about Ethiopia as an imperialist state have continued to define relations between Asmara and Addis Ababa. It is noteworthy that the initial years following Eritrea's independence in 1993 saw a considerable improvement in relations between the two countries, partly because of the support that had been afforded to the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) by the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF) in the latter's struggle to topple the Derg Regime under Mengistu in the 1980s. The EPRDF's rise to power briefly removed the perception of Ethiopia as an imperialist state. However, the advent of a violent and protracted border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea, partly provoked by the former's dream of a Greater Tigray consisting of the Ethiopian state of Tigray and areas that Eritrea considers its national territory, revived perceptions of Ethiopian imperialism in Asmara.[35] Eritrea has therefore continued to interpret Ethiopia's actions through the lens of a formerly colonised and subjugated people, with the right to retain the borders defined by its Italian coloniser.[36]

Another instructive case of difficult co-habitation among seemingly incompatible constituent elements of the post-colonial state in the Horn of Africa is the Sudan, which has been at war with itself for more than three-quarters of its existence.[37] Most of Sudan's co-habitation challenges could be traced to its rather complex colonial experience, particularly the divisive colonial policies brought about by the advent of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium over the territory. Beginning in 1898, Britain took charge of the administration of southern Sudan while allowing Egypt to retain control of northern Sudan.[38] While Egypt proceeded to encourage Islamic values and Arabic culture in northern Sudan, Britain introduced a divisive 'Southern Policy' designed primarily to prevent economic interaction and integration between the northern and southern regions of the country with a view to lessen the Arabic and Islamic influences from the north and to maintain southern Sudan as a distinct buffer for the preservation of English values and beliefs.[39] Furthermore, the British did very little to develop the south of the country and to provide education to its population. If anything, the overall British policy in the Sudan amounted to what Mupenda and Saki have described as a policy of 'differential modernization', which consisted of giving preference to some communities and geographical areas of the colonial entity at the expense of others, with the objective of dividing to better control.[40] The end result of this was that on the eve of independence, Sudan was a very divided country, de-facto split into a more educated, more skilled and more politically empowered Muslim-Arabic north and a less educated, less-skilled and less politically empowered Christian and Animist black South.

In the post-independence era, the northerners, who had acquired superiority status and who traditionally controlled the country, sought to unify it along the lines of Arabism and Islam despite the opposition of non-Muslims, southerners, and other marginalised peoples in the west and east.[41] This only helped to complicate Sudan's inter-group relations and associated conflicts, particularly the conflict between the seemingly incompatible Muslim-Arabic north and the Christian-black and Animist south, culminating in the effective secession of the south through a historic independence referendum on 9 July 2011 to what is now known as the Republic of South Sudan. Contrary to expectations, however, the advent of an independent South Sudanese state has not heralded the kind of peace and stability that many had hoped for, particularly as South Sudan continues to perceive Sudan as an imperialist state, intent on undermining its hard-earned independence.

The birth of South Sudan has introduced new dynamics into the debate on the inviolability of Africa's borders and engendered new border-related tensions between the sovereign states of Sudan (north) and South Sudan with real dangers of destabilising spill-over effects into the broader Horn of Africa region. The independence of South Sudan represents another rare case of major border revision on the continent, almost 20 years after Eritrea's

1993 separation from Ethiopia through a referendum. Sadly though, not only were the circumstances that led to the birth of both Eritrea and South Sudan very traumatic, but the post-independence border relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia on the one hand and between South Sudan and Sudan on the other also seem to be more conflict-prone than cordial. Therefore, despite the founded worries that South Sudan's independence could open a Pandora's box of self-determination claims and possibly numerous incidences of state disintegration on the continent, Africa's governing elites' posture of border status quo has remained very strong. One can therefore safely argue that South Sudan's independence is likely to remain an exception to the norm on the continent with regard to inherited state borders.

With particular regard to the ongoing and recurrent border-related skirmishes between South Sudan and Sudan, it is noteworthy that all the actors involved in various peace processes in the territory and in negotiating the birth of the new state of South Sudan were always aware of the fact that the border between Sudan and South Sudan would remain a potent source of conflict, especially in light of the occurrence of strategic natural resources, particularly oil, in these border areas.[42] Even more significantly, the status of a number of border territories, including Abyei, are yet to be decided, leaving room for territorial claims and counter claims – making the border between Sudan and South Sudan particularly volatile.[43] This is in spite of the existence of very strong inter-dependencies between the two states – particularly with regard to the occurrence of huge volumes of oil resources in the South, whose transportation to external markets is only possible via pipelines running through the territoryof Sudan and its ports. Many commentators have rightly observed that if these interdependencies were properly harnessed, they could convert the common borders between Sudan and South Sudan from epic centres of conflict to bridges of cooperation and integration. This, however, does not seem to be likely in the short and medium term, partly because of entrenched mutual distrust and suspicion between the two countries.

Overall, border-related conflicts in the Horn of Africa have been characterised by state dyads in which the norms of decolonisation and territorial integrity continue to clash with each other. It would seem that the idea of decolonisation and self-determination has been prioritised in the mindset of some of the region's states, which believe that they are still victims of internal imperialism and subjugation. This has had the effect of blurring Africa's territorial standards in the region and complicated the management of border-related and other forms of conflict.[44]

The Liberian war, the porous West African borders and the regionalisation of conflict

Liberia's 14-year-long civil war was partly the product of corrupt and autocratic leadership that deepened the country's historical legacies of class, tribal and religious divisions. While the coup that toppled William Tolbert and brought Samuel Doe to power in 1980 was the genesis of the turmoil that later plagued Liberia, it was the protracted military struggle initiated in 1989 to topple Doe that set the stage for the regionalisation of the Liberian crisis. The Liberian civil war spread to Sierra Leone only two years later. While the other immediate neighbour, Guinea, escaped having its own full-blown civil war for some years, partly because of the heavy-handedness of its government, it had to contend with managing several internal dissident groups that were backed by Liberian and Sierra Leonean combatants, and that rendered several towns and villages along Guinea's borders with its two neighbours particularly insecure and unstable.[45]

Liberia's entanglement with regional rebel movements created a complex cross-border security situation

Perhaps the most significant regional casualty of the Liberian civil war has been Côte d'Ivoire, which until the late 1990s was one of sub-Saharan Africa's most stable and prosperous countries. It slipped into a protracted civil war after a failed coup in September 2002.[46] Against the background of the porous nature of West Africa's borders and the rather fluid security situation in the region resulting from the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire readily became the new flashpoint in West Africa's interconnected and intractable conflicts.[47] Liberia's entanglement with regional rebel movements created a complex cross-border security situation in which each state appeared to define its internal and external security largely in terms of providing some support to rebels fighting governments in neighbouring countries.[48] For example, security along the Guinea–Liberia border could only be secured through Guinea's relationship with the rebel group named the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) in Liberia. Similarly, President Laurent Gbagbo's regime in Côte d'Ivoire backed the splinter rebel Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) to counter the Liberian government's involvement in the Ivorian war.[49]

It is noteworthy that cross-border religious, cultural and ethnic affinities in West Africa were used to manipulate

vulnerable and marginalised border peoples to support what were usually presented as movements for liberation and justice.[50] The exploitation of ethnicity and other primordial identities in the execution of West Africa's regional conflicts once more underscores the disruptiveness of Africa's artificial boundaries, which have tended to split compatible groups while attempting to force together incompatible ones into Africa's post-colonial state systems.

What flows from the three case studies examined above is that the regionalisation of conflicts in West Africa, the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa has been facilitated by the fluid nature of borders and the fact that weak African states do not seem to have full control over their own territories, which is an essential characteristic of real statehood. The analyses also highlight the fact that ethnic groups split by state boundaries tend to facilitate the transfer of conflicts across boundaries, partly because of the predisposition of these artificially separated groups to embrace and provide sanctuary to their kith and kin as they flee from battle. On the other hand, these supposedly sympathetic peoples in border areas become casualties as governments in their attempts to neutralise rebel elements make cross-border raids and target border populations indiscriminately.

Borders need to be secured and properly controlled to prevent them from serving as havens for radical elements and to avoid innocent border peoples from becoming victims of conflict. Although there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that the proper delimitation and effective demarcation of borders alone will resolve border-related conflicts, it is recognised as being a critical first step. Recognition of this fact has been part of the impulse to craft the AU Border Programme (AUBP), which places particular premium on the proper delimitation and effective demarcation of the continent's international borders.

FUTURE CAUSES OF BORDER-RELATED CONFLICTS AND THE AU BORDER-MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

In spite of their absurdity and incongruousness, African inter-stateboundaries and systems remain an immutable colonial legacy. Only a few exceptions apply, as epitomised by the split of Eritrea from Ethiopia and, to a lesser extent, the desperate efforts by Somaliland and the Saharawi people to detach themselves from Somalia and Morocco respectively, and the threatened disintegration of Sudan.[51] Africa's long-standing policy of the inviolability of its inherited boundaries continues to be popular among Africa's governing elite. However, the multiple tensions arising from the configuration of states and state boundaries are beginning to force a profound change on this elite's vision for peace, security and stability. According to Anatole Ayissi, the multi-faceted territorial tensions of the African state system have derived from two principal sources, namely:[52]

- Pressure from below, originating in the informal dynamics and vibrancy of trans-border collaboration between peoples suffering the stumbling blocks erected by official discourses anchored in notions of the inviolability of colonially inherited borders, non-interference in domestic affairs of states and, more crucially, sovereign independence and equality.
- Growing lateral pressure, particularly in border areas, deriving from a combination of forces that include, among others, the cross-boundary regionalisation of armed conflicts and their attendant consequences; subversive organised trans-border crime and illicit trafficking in small arms, diamonds and other precious metals, and of women and children; the emergence of 'continental' African wars (i.e. the Great Lakes region); and the destabilising trans-border proliferation of refugees, small arms and light weapons.

Looking at the sources of Africa's territorial tensions, it is trite to argue that the continent's future border-related conflicts will be a continuation of the spill-over of governance-related intra-state conflict; struggles over strategic resources located in border areas, particularly oil as Africa's oil becomes increasingly attractive to global capitalists; trans-border crimes, including human trafficking and the smuggling of drugs and small arms; and the use of neglected border areas as sanctuaries for terrorist groups. These tensions and pressures have been a defining factor in the evolution of the continent's new strategy for regional cooperation and integration, particularly as far as it concerns territoriality. Characteristic of this re-orientation of vision and action has been the prioritisation of the dynamics from below in both official political and diplomatic discourses and agendas.

There is growing consensus among both policy-makers and academics that Africa's borders require a set of inter-related actions, revolving around the following three issues:

- The legitimisation of African borders, either in their current form, which will mean remaining with the policy of boundary status quo, or in a revised form. Either way, there is an urgent imperative to determine and demarcate these borders effectively. It is important that border delimitation is not regarded as separating countries or states. Rather, they are necessary preconditions for successful cooperation and integration, in the same way that undefined or poorly defined borders are a potential source of dispute

between neighbouring states and even states further afield. Undefined borders are also a source of internal conflict because of the lack of authority exercised on some segments of the polity.

- The effective control of legitimate state boundaries through the establishment of adequate national and regional infrastructural and logistical capacities to create an effective state presence across national territories.
- More significantly, the transformation of African boundaries from fragile and porous 'barriers' into robust, collaborative 'bridges', particularly by the implementation of realistic policies designed to strengthen African cooperative and collaborative endeavours, both from above and below, for the purpose of enhancing peace, security and development on the continent.[53]

The foregoing actions are in agreement with the new thinking within the AU on managing Africa's border challenges, as reflected in the major thrusts of the AUBP. Crafted against the background of the recognition that Africa's borders remain a potent source of conflict and dispute, partly because of their poor demarcation and the occurrence of strategic natural resources in border areas, the programme inter alia aims at the following:

- Addressing the issue of border delimitation and demarcation, especially against the background of the non-delimitation and demarcation of more than two-thirds of the continent's international boundaries
- Addressing cross-border criminal activities, in particular by limiting the use of border areas as sanctuaries by armed insurgents and terrorist organisations
- Consolidating the gains made in the regional integration process, as evidenced in the establishment of RECs and numerous large-scale cooperation initiatives
- Facilitating the development of cross-border integration dynamics, sustained by local stakeholders
- Fostering capacity-building in the area of border management, including the development of special education and research programmes[54]

The programme builds on the long-standing conviction by African leaders that the achievement of greater unity and solidarity among African states and peoples requires a reduction of the burden imposed on them by borders. Although the programme borrows numerous elements from a number of political and legal instruments evolved over the years to guide efforts to manage border issues, including principles in respect of borders inherited from colonial times and the peaceful resolution of border conflicts, it nevertheless represents a new form of pragmatic border management aimed at promoting peace, security and stability, while also facilitating integration and sustainable development on the continent. In the words of African ministers In charge of border issues, '… not only will the conversion of African boundaries from obstacles to bridges, linking one state to another, accelerate Africa's integration agenda, it will also strengthen the continent's unity, and promote peace, security and stability through the structural prevention of conflicts'.[55]

The chairperson of the AU Commission, Jean Ping, echoes the same sentiments by observing that, 'by adopting the AUBP, African leaders have clearly expressed their commitment to maximise the junction and bridge aspects of African borders and ensure that they are managed in such a manner to contribute to the achievement of two key objectives of the AU, namely the structural prevention of conflicts and the deepening of the ongoing integration processes'.[56] Ping argues further that while the inviolability of the borders inherited from the colonial period remains a cardinal principle for the continent, and their demarcation a priority, this is not in any way intended to confine African countries to their respective national territories. Rather, border delimitation and demarcation is seen as a precondition for successful integration, because a non-defined border is susceptible to being a source of contention, even conflict. Border demarcation therefore should be seen as having the potential to open rather than close the doors for cooperation and integration.[57]

The programme is endowed with a clear implementation strategy, which emphasises a multi-level implementation approach, embracing member states, RECs and continental bodies, in particular the AU. It stresses the sharing of responsibilities on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity, and respect for state sovereignty with regard to the various components of the AUBP, namely delimitation and demarcation, local cross-border cooperation and capacity building.[58] The AUBP is to be resourced through an inclusive governance strategy involving AU member states, RECs, parliamentarians, locally elected representatives and civil society, as well as external partners such as the European Border Movement, the UN and others that have prior experience in border management and border cooperation issues.[59]

The AUBP is an ambitious and innovative long-term strategy, the impact of which will take several years to become visible. The programme is in a very early phase, being only in the process of surveying Africa's numerous boundaries to ascertain their status, and in detailing the institutions that are responsible for border issues at national, regional and continental levels. Despite the good faith that has been manifested towards the programme by

many of Africa's external partners, it will be a challenge to secure dependable long-term sources of funding. Despite the noble goals of this programme, interested parties should be aware that border delimitation and demarcation alone may not provide a panacea for border-related conflicts in Africa. There are a host of domestic and regional factors that have to be addressed as well, including the need to overcome the bane of poor governance.

CONCLUSION

Africa's interstate boundaries have remained a major source of conflict and instability on the continent, largely because of their artificial character, poor delineation and demarcation, and their porousness. In spite of recognition that the colonial boundaries are not viable in their current state, the continent's governing elite has elected and stuck to a policy of territorial status quo, partly because of a legitimate concern that any attempt to review the boundaries will lead to anarchy. Although this policy is said to have averted the border contestation a border review policy may have produced, a number of border conflicts have occurred since African states achieved independence. Some of these have been brief, while others have been very protracted. As a matter of fact, boundary-related inter-state conflict has been the prevalent reason for conflict on the continent, while the colonially imposed African state system has gone largely unchallenged.

In the post-Cold War era, notions of freedom of expression took centre stage, energising many groups that had been suppressed for decades by autocratic governments and the rigidity of state sovereignty. This resulted in a number of governance-related intra-state conflicts, which rapidly displaced border-related inter-state conflicts as the dominant threat to peace and security on the continent. The reality of Africa's porous boundaries was further exposed by the ease with which these intra-state conflicts spilled across borders to engulf whole regions in what became popularly known as the regionalisation of African conflicts.

Although Africa's governing elite has remained faithful to its policy of territorial status quo, strong lateral and vertical pressures appear to be forcing a re-orientation in the approach to the management of state boundaries. The focus is now on transforming borders from barriers to bridges of integration and cooperation, and on developing the border areas to stop these from acting as conduits for the transmission of conflict and violence. For this to happen, however, African states, individually and collectively through regional and sub-regional organisations, should consider the following proposals, among others:

- The adoption of policies that will transform border areas from their current neglected and backward status to areas that are properly integrated with the rest of the country. This can be achieved by the development of road, rail and communications infrastructure, and the location of industries and related economic activities in border areas.
- Where natural resources occur in border areas, governments should consider the option of their joint exploitation by border peoples, with the dividends being shared.
- The development of mechanisms and policies that will facilitate collaboration among border-area administrative personnel, in particular immigration and custom officials.
- The assessment of the historical, economic and cultural ties and other commonalities that exist among border peoples, and harnessing these to foster cross-border cooperation and inter-state integration.
- Governments and regional organisations should identify and monitor potential sources of tensions among border peoples and intervene timeously in an effort to resolve them before they engulf national governments. This would require the setting up of border-based early warning systems linked to the regional early warning mechanisms of the RECs.
- Finally, for all these policy actions to occur, the ongoing project aimed at delineating and demarcating African borders properly would need to be accelerated to remove the ambiguities caused by the contestation of boundary lines and related issues of jurisdiction over territories and resources. This would require the establishment of effective national, regional and continental border commissions, with their interfaces clearly defined. The acceleration of the work of the AUBP would also entail sensitising various stakeholders, especially border peoples, about the advantages of border delimitation and demarcation. Fears that such exercises would result in the erection of barriers that would impede peoples' movements and activities would need to be allayed.

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1 All the views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not in any way reflect the position of any of the institutions he has worked for or still works for.

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ABOUT THIS PAPER

This paper examines the potential of Africa's international boundaries as sources of conflict and future threats to peace and security on the continent. It argues that although border-related inter-state conflicts have been displaced by governance-related intra-state conflict, Africa's poorly demarcated boundaries are still potent sources of conflict, particularly as far as the spilling over of intra-state conflicts to neighbouring countries is concerned. Despite the artificial and unviable character of the borders of many African states, the continent's governing elite has over the years stuck to a policy of maintaining the status quo of the continent's internationally recognised borders. However, a number of persistent pressures have recently forced a rethink on the approach to be taken to the management of Africa's boundary problems, with the focus being on the proper delineation and demarcation of borders.

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