

South Africa and the African Peace and Security Architecture

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■ Executive summary

This report interprets South Africa's contribution to the evolution and performance of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) of the African Union (AU). It examines the evolution of APSA, provides an overview of the post-apartheid South African government's Africa policy, and concludes with some insights derived from interviews with South African government officials and analysts.

The key finding is that the South African government displays paradoxical behaviour regarding APSA. On the one hand, it exercises considerable "soft" power and influence throughout Africa, which the report describes as "peace diplomacy". To a large degree it also shaped the establishment of the AU and its APSA. On the other hand, South Africa underplays its current presence in APSA decision-making structures and processes, thereby undermining its ability to influence the strategic peace and security agendas of key multilateral bodies such as the Southern African Development Community, the AU and, by extension, the United Nations. Several factors underlie this phenomenon, including a tendency to over-extend the country's diplomatic role. However, the report suggests that this is because of the South African government's inability to give effect to a comprehensive national security policy framework that ought to guide its choices and behaviour regarding the African peace and security terrain.

Introduction: the evolution of APSA

The African Union (AU) was established 2001 to replace the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). The AU has 14 stated objectives, of which the key ones are to achieve unity and solidarity among the countries and peoples of Africa; to defend the sovereignty of its member states; to accelerate the political and socioeconomic integration of the continent; and to promote peace and security, democracy and human rights, and sustainable development. The AU is made up of both political and administrative bodies. The highest decision-making organ is the Assembly of the AU, made up of all the heads of state and government of AU member states. The AU also has a representative body, the Pan African Parliament, as well as the Executive Council, the Permanent Representatives Committee, and the AU Commission, which is the secretariat to the political structures.

The key driver of the emergence and evolution of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) is the understanding that "ensuring peace and order is a prerequisite for the

promotion of peace, development and the improvement of Africans' livelihoods" (Murithi, 2013: 267). In Murithi's view the AU can now be viewed as a "norm entrepreneur" and the behaviour of its Peace and Security Council (PSC) as "interventionist". However, he also points out that the limitations of APSA's fledgling institutions have been exposed in complex humanitarian situations such as that in the Darfur region of Sudan. Indeed, he concludes that there is a "security gap" in Africa between what the AU wants to achieve and what it can realistically deliver (this corresponds with what is called a "capabilities-expectations gap"). In the view of several analysts the AU will need to seriously orient the political leadership of the continent and take decisive and necessary action to ensure successful peace operations.

This assessment raises the question of the role of Africa's strong regional powers – Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, Kenya and others – in shaping and managing APSA. And the flipside of this coin is as important to consider – i.e. the impact of states that flout the AU's rules of compliance

(“norm breakers”), of which there are several, as pointed out by Aning (2013).

Aning (2013) uses a blend of regime and institutional theory to sketch the nature of APSA. From this perspective the AU’s Constitutive Act and the Peace and Security Council Protocol comprise a regime with rules, norms and principles that member states “should adhere to” (clearly they do not always do so). This regime seeks to provide a framework for cooperation among member states in order to accomplish a distinctive set of policy goals that are expected to be governed by African norms and values. Non-compliance (behaviour that results from a narrow focus on the national interest, misunderstanding or the inability to adjust) can lead to coercive or diplomatic responses by the regime or individual regime members.

Overall, then, APSA exists because of a convergence of interests shared by most AU member states in pursuing common interests.

The AU’s security architecture for peace, security, and stability is based on collective and human security issues to be operationalised by several institutional processes, including the Continental Early Warning System, the African Standby Force (ASF), the Panel of the Wise and the Peace Fund. Overseeing these processes is the PSC (Engel & Porto, 2009).

PSC and ASF

When it comes to conflict management, the ASF is arguably the key intervention mechanism in the AU’s security architecture. When operational, it will consist of multidisciplinary standby contingents stationed in their respective countries of origin and ready for rapid deployment when required. The ASF’s mandate covers a wide range of actions, from observation and monitoring missions to humanitarian assistance, more complex peace support missions, intervention in a member state in grave circumstances or at the request of a member state, the restoration of peace and security, preventive deployment, and peacebuilding.

However, there is little point in having an elaborate and costly instrument when the AU cannot afford (or agree) to activate it at times of grave crisis. This reality has led to a decision by the AU Summit in 2013 to establish a rapid reaction force (clumsily called the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises or ACIRC)¹ under the guidance of volunteer member states to “close the gap” – i.e. to intervene until such time as the ASF and/or United Nations (UN) are ready to take up position in a theatre of conflict.

Despite this additional measure, the establishment of the ASF proceeds. To this end the AU has been making use of so-called roadmaps. Roadmap I (2006–08) provided for the development of the necessary basic documents (doctrine, standard operating procedures, etc.). Roadmap II (2008–10) prepared the ASF for peacekeeping missions and resulted in a so-called Command Post Exercise called Amani Africa to test the deployment and management of a peace mission. Lessons learnt from this exercise resulted in the adoption by the AU in 2012 of Roadmap III. As the chairperson of the AU Commission reported, this roadmap envisions the readiness of the ASF to deploy by 2015 and its three main objectives are to:

- (i) finalise pending actions in operational, legal, logistics and structural areas; (ii) review the ASF Vision to ensure its coherence with Africa’s needs, and (iii) highlight new priorities and challenges: RDC, humanitarian action, management of the Police component and coordination of the civilian component.

Over and above these challenges, the relationship between the AU and its regional partners – regional economic communities (RECs) and regional mechanisms – in the operationalisation of the ASF remains untested. As Williams (2013: 17) recently noted,

Arguably the most unclear but potentially significant issues have revolved around the process of authorising and mandating missions for the various component parts of the ASF: Do the PSC and the AU have supreme authority to utilise the ASF? Do the RECs share this function? Can the RECs deploy the ASF regional brigades independently of the PSC? Should the PSC deal directly with the RECs or the individual member states comprising the regional brigades? And, can the regional brigades deploy to different regions?

Key decision-making institutions include the AU Assembly (the meeting place of AU heads of state and governments), the Executive Council, the PSC and the Commission. The political leadership of the AU, as represented in the Assembly, makes the final decisions on important peace and security issues such as intervention in the affairs of member states. In reality, however, the PSC is empowered to take most decisions on security issues on behalf of the Assembly.

The PSC is composed of 15 members and its seats are distributed to ensure a geopolitical balance: four to West Africa, three to Central Africa, three to East Africa, three to Southern Africa, and two to North Africa, without any right of veto powers for any member state. The AU Commission – and its chair – acts as the PSC secretariat and has a special role to play in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. Together with a commissioner of

¹ There is some disagreement regarding the precise name: this is the one that appears in the document Assembly/AU/Dec.489(XXI) adopted by the 21st Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly.

peace and security, the chair ensures that PSC decisions are implemented and followed up. The chair must also prepare regular reports and documents to enable the PSC to operate efficiently.

The PSC is arguably one of the AU's most effective bodies, although there is substantial scope for the improvement of its supporting mechanisms, working methods and reporting mechanisms. Aning (2013) also characterises the behaviour of the PSC as “compromise and deliberate constructive ambiguity” – a feature that enables African states to negotiate and build consensus between two contradictory principles: classical non-interference versus the “new” right of the AU to intervene.

A foreign affairs official argued that long-term African stability requires substantial work on three fronts: the establishment of security on a regional basis (offering guarantees to neighbours and drawing them into a diplomatic process); the creation of a new political dispensation, with mechanisms for justice and political incorporation; and the promotion of a development dynamic that widens and deepens the stakes in peace. Critically, these processes should take place in a committed, concurrent and sustained manner. This “will not happen without external support” (Cravinho, 2009: 199).

South Africa in Africa: the challenges of peace diplomacy

A key driver of South Africa's post-apartheid foreign and defence policies is the desire to contribute to Africa's stabilisation and recovery, while in the process gaining access to trade and business opportunities – and so demonstrating to its citizens the value of engaging the rest of Africa (Van Nieuwkerk, 2012). Such a role is not unique to this country – governments with ambitious foreign policy agendas tend to exercise power and influence abroad in order to gain domestically. It is also true that often the return on the investment is less than satisfactory – as U.S. meddling in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrates. To what extent is South Africa contributing to Africa's stabilisation and recovery efforts and how is it constrained in exercising this role?

Peace diplomacy

The South African government's approach to Africa is essentially the exercise of peace diplomacy, defined as its involvement in continental peacemaking (diplomatic interventions in the form of mediation or negotiation processes), UN-mandated peacekeeping operations, and peacebuilding (in line with the AU framework for post-conflict reconstruction and development). Peace diplomacy can also be equated to the exercise of soft power. Such an approach is by definition driven by multi-actor coalitions of decision-makers and implementers in government and state structures.

As expected, in the wake of its transitional experiences, the post-apartheid South African government incorporated several “best practices” in its foreign policy posture – including peace diplomacy – and soon developed a reputation as an able conflict mediator, particularly in Africa, but also elsewhere, such as with the Lockerbie case, Northern Ireland, and Timor Leste (although there is doubt as to what extent its mediation efforts outside Africa can be regarded as effective).

South Africa's behaviour can best be described as that of an emerging middle power. Indeed, since 1994 its government has followed a pragmatic, reformist foreign policy agenda. This was not always the case. South Africa's relationship with Africa evolved over time. This is because material conditions change, as do decision-makers (presidents Mandela, Mbeki and Zuma illustrate that personalities matter). Furthermore, where the interests of domestic actors (government, political formations, business, civil society) overlap, it produces a convergence of views (the “national interest”) that cannot be assumed to be static, but changes dynamically over time.

In the area of peacemaking and the promotion of governance and post-conflict reconstruction, South Africa undoubtedly made an impact. Indeed, for African politicians and rebel leaders eager to cut deals, Pretoria became the interlocutor – and destination – of choice. These efforts included bilateral and multilateral South African involvement in peacemaking, governance and post-conflict reconstruction processes in Burundi, the Central African Republic, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia/Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Rwanda, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe.

South Africa's peace interventions: a mixed record

Not all the conflict resolution interventions by the South African government can be regarded as successful: in South Africa's “age of unilateralism” its nose got bloodied on a number of occasions. South Africa's mid-1990s foreign policy goals of contributing to stability and a return to democracy in Nigeria initially produced negligible results. Other factors contributed to a breakthrough in the crisis, including presidents Abacha's and Abiola's unexpected deaths, which opened the door for a reconfiguration of political relations and bargaining and negotiating processes. Perhaps the most significant fall-out from this intervention was that South Africa became more isolated from the rest of Africa and became reluctant to pursue unilateral actions, preferring instead to seek African consensus on interventions.

Elsewhere, the South African government failed in its attempts to persuade the Angolan, Mozambican and DRC governments to shift their approaches away from military confrontation with rebel movements to that of a negotiated settlement and the adoption of a government of national unity. It also failed to prevent its colleagues in the Southern

African Development Community (SADC) from engaging militarily in the DRC war, while attempts to quietly influence the key players in Zimbabwe to adopt a power-sharing arrangement initially showed no signs of success. The violent 2008 elections in Zimbabwe produced a stalemate, which opened the door to a negotiated power-sharing agreement and a halt to economic disintegration. The so-called Inclusive Government was never a popular arrangement and over time became less credible. This – and SADC mediation – came to an end after ZANU PF trounced the opposition in the 2013 national elections.

This brings us to recent events in Libya. Many have expressed disappointment at the South African vote in favour of UN Security Council Resolution 1973. The resolution called for all necessary measures to protect civilians “under threat of attack”. The resolution also expressly excluded “a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory”. South Africa and Nigeria voted in favour, as did the U.S., France and Britain, while Brazil, India and China abstained.

The problem with the implementation of the resolution related to the extent to which the civilian population was to be protected. It seems that the members of the Global South on the Security Council wanted action to protect civilians under threat of violence and not for the mandate to be interpreted as being in favour of removing the Qaddafi regime and sponsoring the creation of an armed political opposition. However, the power politics of the Security Council overrode such considerations.

Subsequent events demonstrated that a regime change agenda, as articulated by the Americans, French and British, and implemented by NATO, was driving the international intervention. Disturbingly, the AU intervention by the Ad Hoc High Level panel led by President Jacob Zuma made little impact on the ground.

The South African vote in favour of Resolution 1973 appears in hindsight to have been an error of judgement. NATO’s increasingly brutal bombing campaign, defiant rebel-supporting activities and Qaddafi’s targeted killing were seemingly not anticipated.

This apparent bleak record must be seen in the context of successful interventions elsewhere. The joint Botswana-South Africa military intervention – seemingly under SADC auspices – in Lesotho in 1998 is criticised by many as a failure. Despite its shortcomings, however, Operation Boleas succeeded in stabilising the situation in order for a process of political negotiations on a new constitution and voting system to take off. In the case of the DRC, the South African government’s persistence in playing the role of peacemaker also paid off. Despite ongoing violence in the east of the DRC, the “Sun City” talks in 2002 and the subsequent Pretoria Agreements of 2002-03 laid the foundations for a credible peace process and opened the door to the post-war reconstruction of Congolese society. South African

personnel continue to make up a large contingent of UN peace support and enforcement operations in the DRC. South African diplomats also play a key role in coordinating the activities of SADC member states and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region in determining the nature of mediation in the DRC and Great Lakes region in the context of the the UN Framework for Peace, Security and Cooperation for the DRC and the Region.

An assessment of South African mediation and participation in peace processes elsewhere in Africa yields mixed results. The record includes the Comoros (where an AU-driven military intervention replaced South African mediation and brought an unstable peace), the Ivory Coast (where former president Mbeki’s role as mediator became controversial and was unceremoniously ended), and the more recent debacle in the Central African Republic, where 14 South African National Defence Force members lost their lives in a fire fight with rebel forces.

What about Darfur and South Sudan? In terms of the latter, it is well known that the South African government spent much time and many resources in support of the creation of this new state. Surely, this is an example of South African peace diplomacy at its best? The answer depends on how one understands the motives and actual contribution of the South African government.

A cynical yet perceptive analyst recently argued that South Africa’s approach to Sudan reflects many of the core economic, political and ideological elements of South Africa’s foreign policy: growing commercial interests on the continent; a strategic need for energy; a desire to contribute to peace and stability in Africa; and an anti-imperialist paradigm, which leads to solidarity with regimes that are under Western pressure, regardless of their human rights performance. To further complicate the picture, commentators detect incompatibility between the policies of the African National Congress government and the interests of the South African private sector. Regardless of the South African government’s intentions, at the time of writing, news from South Sudan and the Central African Republic regarding the resumption of violent conflict and the spectre of genocide or civil war casts a dark shadow over the assumed relationship between external intervention and stability.

Current and future prospects

The South African government’s view of the country’s continental role, initially infused with notions of national reconciliation as the way to solve violent conflicts and human rights activism, has been tempered by the realities of the African condition. Policymaking adjustments under the Mbeki administration allowed peacemaking, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction to be implemented with modest, yet growing success. Under the Zuma administration these strategic objectives remain key – although a new cast of characters usually bring new nuances to established approaches and, as we have seen, a less coherent

decision-making style relating to crisis management. There are additional constraints. The South African government remains hampered by a relatively weak domestic base. Even though South Africa's economy is much bigger than the combined economies of the Southern African region, resources are constrained by factors such as poverty and unemployment, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, a fragile racial reconciliation, and the impact of the global financial crisis.

In addition, South Africa's "emerging middle power" role is exercised with the close involvement of external powers. Whether this always happens to South Africa's or the continent's benefit is hard to determine. Self-interest drives the presence of external powers on the continent and cooperation via so-called "trilateral cooperation" has the potential to contribute to stabilisation or even development. However, the South African government's close association with Western powers in pursuing peace and security agendas draws criticism from many quarters. Perhaps a good example of this dilemma is the mid-2013 joint exercise between South African and U.S. military forces, ostensibly also in preparation for humanitarian interventions – but as we noted above in the case of Libya, such approaches run the danger of a slippery slide into regime change.

Is South Africa's emerging middle-power role on the continent and in the Global South sustainable? Its power and influence depend on a number of factors. Given its position in the global political-economic hierarchy, South Africa is in need of foreign investors, markets and credibility. The European Union (EU) was South Africa's biggest trading partner (by all accounts it has now been overtaken by China), but Africa is a rising export market for South Africa. This is a key motivating factor for seeking to stabilise the continent, which in return benefits from South Africa as a supplier of goods and services.

South Africa's corporate ambitions in Africa seem to be one of the key motivating factors explaining its forays into African peacemaking. Others talk of a policy "contradiction" whereby involvement in peacemaking and peacekeeping is motivated by both a humanistic impulse in the ruling party and government (to alleviate suffering on the continent) and expectations of economic payback (whereby investment in peace processes is expected to reap benefits). Our interaction with officials and others involved in South Africa's peace diplomacy leads us to conclude that these disparate impulses both mark the South African government's decision-making processes and that choices are not easily constructed. It remains critical for South Africa's foreign, security and economic objectives to be formulated and implemented holistically in the long-term pursuit of African peace and development – the keystone of the country's ambitious international relations posture. This requires a harmonised foreign and security policy framework that is complementary to government's emerging trade and economic policy frameworks. For this to work the South African government will have to establish a national

consensus regarding the country's national interests in order to determine its national security policy and strategic approaches.

This conclusion raises the question of the South African government's relationship with the AU, and specifically its peace and security arrangements. How has this relationship evolved and can we describe it as "supportive"? Or is the relationship one of neglect and withdrawal? Can we detect tensions as South Africa pursues an independent, national-interest-driven international relations posture? What is South Africa's view of the AU's PSC and its celebrated yet flawed APSA (as discussed in the section on the PSC and APSA, above) when dealing with matters of peace and security? We interviewed a small number of senior South African officials with intimate knowledge of the relationship and in the section that follows we summarise their insights in terms of our questions.

South African perspectives

This section aims to enrich the preceding academic overview of South Africa's Africa policy approach and practice by presenting the insights of various interviewees in the Department of Defence (DoD), the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRC), the State Security Agency (SSA), and an analyst in charge of a peace and security think-tank (Pax Africa). These interviews reveal a number of recurring themes.

South Africa's contribution to the establishment of the AU APSA

South Africa played a determining role in the creation of the AU in 2002. The SSA official provided the necessary context. In his view, with the conclusion of the fight for liberation and decolonisation in 1994, South Africa gained its freedom and a window of opportunity was opened for it to engage in leadership in the continent. A few years earlier this had been made easier with the end of the cold war. It was those momentums that led to the rethink of the way in which the OAU was to be transformed and renovated to address the burning questions of the day. He added, however, that the undercurrents of the formation of the OAU continued into the AU. The first related to those favouring a big-bang approach of a United States of Africa. This refers to the struggle between pro- and anti-Qaddafi forces in creating a security governance and management system. As a DoD official we interviewed noted, in preparing APSA, "everything we seemed to do was pushing against Qaddafi and his influence on other African states around the United States of Africa, the United Armed Forces and all those kinds of initiatives". The second related to those who believed that there must be agreed-on values that were shared across the continent. The SSA official believed that the big-bang approach was not sustainable. For him, the gulf between the rich and the poor has been growing, despite some strides that have been taken to eradicate poverty in some countries.

The balance that had to be brought was that historically the OAU was working on the principle of non-interference in member states' internal affairs. The AU innovation was that, learning from the experience of the Rwandan genocide and events in other African countries, applying the principle of non-indifference when human rights abuses were taking place – i.e. failure to exercise the Responsibility to Protect – was not possible in all circumstances. This was a very important innovation. Key in this entire process was the engagements of Algeria, Nigeria and South Africa. Former president Thabo Mbeki played a critical role in both motivating and defending how AU institutions were meant to be packaged, to ensure progress in terms of its new approach.

The Pax Africa director, who had been involved in the early deliberations around a continental peace and security design, pointed out that discussions started even before the AU was created. He reflected on the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) – an agreement designed in the early 2000s by the input of the heads of state of Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa to assist with Africa's development. NEPAD developed a democratic governance agenda: as he puts it, "peer review – that's a new word in our African vocabulary – some reflection; taking ownership of your problems". At the same time NEPAD developed a peace and security agenda informed by the human security concept: as the Pax Africa director noted, the belief was that "you can't have sustainable economic development without peace, security and stability".

APSA was created and can be seen as the product of interaction among a number of policymakers and policy entrepreneurs at that time. In the view of the Pax Africa director, Africa needed a visionary leader like Thabo Mbeki and people around him to push this agenda, initiate fresh thinking, and create new structures with resources and accountability.

The SSA official took the story forward. In his view, with the way in which the AU was conceptualised, it became possible to task APSA with three responsibilities. The first was to be preventive, although in his view this has not actually been used to its full potential. The African continent still faces a great many challenges that could easily have been dealt with had the continent's early warning systems been up to standard and its leadership responsive.

The second area was the capacity to intervene and make sure that corrective steps were taken when a conflict had actually broken out – this has been the major preoccupation. The problem with this approach, in his view, is that it is brought in after the horse has already bolted. So it becomes more difficult and more intensive for Africa to be able to find solutions to such problems.

The third was post-conflict reconstruction, i.e. where one focuses on matters of security sector reform and ensures

that state structures are built that can ensure good governance. This has also been a very important AU innovation and is an area where it has not been given the credit it deserves. In a number of countries the situation has improved: Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, etc.

The SSA official also mentioned East Africa, where he believed Somalia had been stabilised mainly by African efforts and continues on a very positive trajectory.

South Africa's motivations for the continued engagement of APSA

South Africa was instrumental in shifting the original position of the ASF away from a continental standby force to five regional forces. Over time, given the difficulties with moving APSA and the ASF forward, it is an intervention South Africa has perhaps come to regret. How else can we explain its seemingly lacklustre support for SADC security policies and implementation practices? It remains unclear what South Africa is doing in relation to the SADC Standby Force (SADC SF) – note our discussion above of its leading role in pushing the ACIRC agenda. Information on South Africa's pledges to the SADC SF in terms of military and police contingents remains shrouded in secrecy. We sensed a growing level of frustration among South African foreign and security officials with managing SADC contradictions: while representing as they do a powerful economic entity, they have to deal with both the political sensitivities of 14 member states and a logistically weak institution.

At the AU level we also detect contradictions. A South African has always headed the planning element (the Peace Support Operations Division) in charge of the ASF and ongoing operations (AMISOM, etc.). How has this engagement with ASF contributed to South Africa's own thinking around peacekeeping? Again, note the role played by South Africa in attempting to establish the ACIRC.

The SSA official explored the motivations for South Africa playing a determining role in the creation and sustaining of APSA. He referred to the South African government's broad policy framework and its "twelve priorities" (a series of policy priorities determined by the South African Presidency and used as the basis for policy implementation across the civil service) and noted that one of these priorities refers to South Africa in the context of an improving and developing Africa. In his view this is a crucial element of South Africa's foreign relations, for several reasons.

This official further reflected on South Africa's role:

South Africa is expected to play a critical role in that process and we are expected to provide leadership Obviously, you have to make sure there is a balance and a direct link between domestic priorities and being involved in those initiatives. And I believe that it is in the national interest that we are actually leading some of these initiatives on the continent.

He believed that South Africa's continental leadership depends to a large extent on a strategic relationship with Nigeria.

However, one has to ask to what extent South Africa is speaking with one voice at the AU and whether it shapes AU APSA agendas. Except for the potential opened up by the election of Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma to head the AU Commission, it appears that our interviewees were sceptical of the claim that South Africa presents a united front and actively shapes agendas.

The DoD officials interviewed reflected on how South Africa was expected to lead in shaping the details of the emerging AU APSA, and in contrast to the picture sketched by the Pax Africa director, it emerged that often South African officials – particularly those from the DoD and DIRCO – do not share similar sets of understandings or even strategic objectives.

One of the DoD officials also reflected on the way SADC developed a position on the ASF concept by pointing out that South Africa played a significant role in creating consensus, despite some real opposition from the SADC Organ Directorate, which coordinates the collective security policies and implementation practices of the member states of SADC, a process often shrouded in controversy, given South Africa's dominant regional role. The official added, "unfortunately, two years ago when we were chair [of the SADC Organ] I did not see any activity". And despite the establishment of a coordinating structure at the DIRCO, he lamented, "nobody drives the strategic agenda". In his view South Africa currently lacks "leadership, coordination, integration and follow-up".

In the view of another DoD official, because of the fairly advanced nature of South African civil society, the South African government tends not to use many of its public servants for policy development. As he explained, "It [the government] would call, it would say – 'NGO director X, what is on your plate? Come and run this workshop so that at the end of the day the AU can have the material to kick-start projects'." The South African government therefore uses those institutions to provide intellectual input.

However, he pointed out – as the other interviewees did – that South African officials can do much more to shape policy agendas. This raises the question of the analytical capacity of state officials engaged in foreign and security policy, which the author sees as weak, underdeveloped and often trapped in a dated liberation narrative.

Critically, from the cases mentioned in the interviews, a broad trend can be observed whereby South African state officials are able to envision, initiate and lead processes, but that this engagement is not sustainable. In addition, South Africa does not necessarily "follow through" with implementation. Several interviewees suggested that the

South African government does not mandate or empower officials to play such a role.

Decision-making dynamics at the AU in terms of APSA

Interviewees also emphasised the uneven quality of security policy decision-making at the AU. Member states are in charge at the UN. They shape UN resolutions and negotiate what needs to be said in a particular resolution – the powerful initiate the process and then coopt others. At the AU, a DoD official noted, "it's the AU Commission who will say – let's not look for too much debate in this session; let's be general. Commend this and that, urge the international community, raise concerns." He believed that Dlamini-Zuma has brought greater seriousness into AU thinking. He explained that usually she does not sit in on PSC meetings, but the commissioner for peace and security would deliver the report to the PSC, thus influencing the way peace and security must move. As he noted: "It is the commissioner who has the staff [capacity] under him to do those reports; and the commissioner would be speaking to the chairperson and saying – 'chairperson, this is the route I am actually going [following] to sway member states'."

Another DoD official reflected on power relations among African decision-makers and between them and outsiders. From his perspective:

The commissioner for peace and security, fortunately, has a staff. He has staff that have an office in that region; they are sending reports; he might have people on the ground. Whereas the member states who are in the PSC, those ambassadors, some of them don't get any reports from their home countries. Ambassadors rely on what the [AU] Commission brings to them. So the quality varies. Unless you have a South Africa that says – "hey-hey Commission, that report, you are missing the point". Some countries are prepared: Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda or Tanzania.

The SSA official pointed out that Africa's dependence on donors was not in APSA's interests :

Africa has to ensure – as SADC has already decided – [that] on critical projects we don't want outside funding; we want to fund it ourselves. It is a very important culture that needs to be developed because in the peace and security terrain the AU is still getting sponsorship from the EU ... close to 90% of the Peace and Security budget comes from the EU. And so if the money is not going to be given without strings attached, your ability to implement the decisions you take on the continent has become a problem.

That's why I welcome the recent decision that there would be [a] rapid intervention capacity that is going to be wholly African owned and that African countries volunteer to put their boots on the ground when the situation demands.

On this latter point, one of the DoD officials took a different view. For him, the danger with the ACIRC is that its creation and utilisation might bypass established multilateral decision-making rules and procedures and be deployed at the insistence of some countries and not with the agreement of all, or even deployed at the insistence of outside forces such as the U.S. or the French.

Overall, however, in one DoD official's view, the AU is an institution hungry for positive influence and the continent looks to South Africa as the major player in this regard. However, the South African government can only improve its role if it makes its citizens conscious of how important the AU is. The DoD official proposed that the South African government should visit academic institutions: "come to the politics department, look for and identify the young and upcoming undergraduates – we [can] put them into entry levels into the AU." Ironically, he was simultaneously of the view that "I have often found that the majority of academics that comment on African issues ... take too much of a Eurocentric approach in understanding ... Africa."

Regarding the performance of the ASF, one DoD official stated that "I was at the heart of this: this grand idea of an African Standby Force, constituted of regional brigades". He reflected on its creation by pointing out that Libya put forward the idea of a standing army. As he noted:

You see, love Qaddafi or hate him, he was a visionary, but his ideas were too radical. [He was] not informed by reality, but he had a vision: a United States of Africa. He came [up] with the [idea of an] "African army". ... then the AU Commission said that this makes sense. We need to have some deployable capacity for peacekeeping. We've just gone through Rwanda; we've had Liberia and Sierra Leone – let's wake up!

However, he pointed out that "the debate waters down ... because everybody's saying that it's unrealistic. You are not going to have sovereign states surrendering their troops to a multilateral institution."

He then concluded that the idea of a watered-down army evolved into one of regional standby forces:

It's in your country; you identify the units that you can make available when they are needed, keep them busy at your own expense. When the member states need them they call the region and that region mobilises the unit.

Another DoD official reflected on the AU's inability to deploy the ASF and the concept of rapid deployment, especially as it was discussed at the 2013 AU Summit. As he noted,

President Zuma is saying the ASF is taking too long; let's test this thing now. It's a bit of a complication – testing it now, it will not be regional[ly] based. It will be

specific member states – South Africa, Tanzania – who are keen to volunteer.

Reflecting on the AU's inability to intervene in the crises in Libya, Mali and Ivory Coast, another official commented:

the issue of the non-response of the AU is not a reflection of the unwillingness or unpreparedness of the ASF. It is a reflection of the malaise with how the AU operates in response to [a] crisis ... when you have a crisis its intervention will depend on who is prepared to give you forces at that particular point in time.

Interviewees also commented on the challenges of operationalising the ASF. A DoD official focused on the SADC SF in particular and identified a number of challenges, including technical expertise, but also political will. He noted that "SADC is saying, 'we look to you to take the lead because you have the expertise'". Another official commented that in his view, for the ASF to work,

South Africa has to stand up and become the framework nation. The issue is that we are scared of being called the Big Brother and the hegemon. We went to see Commissioner Ping. He said "guys, you are the US of Africa. You have to stand up and come to the party. South Africa has to play this role, and nobody else can play this role."

South Africa: the hesitant hegemon

Many interviewees pointed to a paradox: South African peace and security leadership is needed on the continent, but the government is hesitant (or perhaps unable) to provide it. This appears to be the case despite the election of Dlamini-Zuma as the AU Commission chair. Below, we offer some insights from our interviewees.

For the SSA official, "South Africa has little choice in the matter" [i.e. leading on peace and security issues]. As he noted,

The fact of the matter is South Africa can't go to a conference thinking that it can just sit behind the flank. It doesn't work. When you go to a conference, people will ask you to say something when there's a deadlock, when there isn't progress on particular issues. They want to meet with you and put issues on the table and whether you want to say yes or no, body language, sitting behind the flank – there are high expectations.

He believed that

what has actually happened in the last 19 years has been the failure of South Africans (especially the people in the media) to appreciate and understand that whether we want to exercise ... leadership or not we are in the leadership position. People, if we handle ourselves properly, would be ready and willing to accept

our leadership, but if we are not going to exercise the space we are occupying with a sense of responsibility then we will have problems that big powers like the U.S. are faced with [in] the rest of the world.

In the view of the SSA official, South Africa cannot afford the ongoing situation of being underrepresented in the AU, SADC and other international bodies. The country should be actively deploying people into targeted posts to influence the strategic agenda. This requires leadership at the political, administrative and technocratic levels. For some the issue is even broader: it is in South Africa's national interest to pursue a national security strategy "where you mesh your foreign policy, your security policy and your defence policy" and where "you deploy your sharpest, brightest people working in our interest [at the AU PSC], and we are not doing it".

Conclusion and recommendations

There is little doubt that, under the leadership of President Thabo Mbeki, South Africa played a critical role in the founding of the AU and its nascent peace and security architecture. Regardless of how one views President Zuma's foreign policy style, on the formal policy level the South African government remains committed to what it calls its "African agenda" – a policy template whereby Southern Africa and the rest of the continent enjoy priority of place in the conduct of the country's international relations. Policymakers and government leaders regularly voice the "Mandela mantra": South Africa's domestic growth and stability are directly linked to the fortunes of the African continent.

One would therefore expect this commitment to be on display at all levels of the government's interaction with Africa, whether bilaterally or multilaterally. Indeed, going a step further, one would expect the government to enter into a partnership with civil society and academia regarding the promotion of its "African agenda".

However, not enough of this is currently happening. There is no structured interaction between the government and civil society, and little has come of the mooted "Council on Foreign Relations" idea. The government has delayed the operationalisation of the South African Development Partnership Agency, which is supposed to play a critical role in South Africa's trilateral approach to African affairs. In the same vein, there is little to show for years of preparation of a codified foreign policy.

Reading the South African government's foreign policy intent – at least as far as Africa is concerned – has become more difficult over time. Few analysts have yet been able to explain in clear terms the South African government's approach to the crises in Ivory Coast, Libya and the Central African Republic.

This disturbing pattern is evident when listening to interviewees explaining the South African government's current approach to and role in the AU APSA. As reflected above, several (although not all) point to a curious "leadership withdrawal" from engaging in the nitty-gritty of APSA decision-making, in particular at the strategic levels: the AU PSC and SADC Organ Troika, and the operational level: the AU Peace and Security Department and SADC Organ Directorate. The loudest lament seems to be that South African leadership is absent from critical decisions relating to African peace and security.

Explanations for this "hesitant hegemony" range from inexperience (the South African government is only two decades into managing continental affairs), to capacity constraints (a lack of properly trained, equipped and experienced government officials at all levels) and policy incoherence (a lack of strategic intent). Coupled with this is the reality of an African peace and security policy environment challenged by ongoing, recurring, and emerging crises across and even beyond the continent.

Although there are few immediate solutions, several suggestions can be made to improve the situation. All of these should assist, enable and enhance the South African government's crisis management capacity.

Recommendations

Firstly, the South African government should invest in human capacity-building and develop a system whereby African tours of duty become part of the career development trajectories of appropriate officials.

Secondly, peace and security-oriented civil society actors and academics (as well as the private sector) have much to offer in terms of hands-on experience, training and educational skills, and research and analysis, and the government should develop a structured interaction with interested non-state actors. At the same time it must improve its dismal public diplomacy record, i.e. its outreach to the public at home and audiences abroad to explain its choices and decisions.

Finally – and perhaps most critically – the South African government appears currently unable to give effect to a comprehensive national security policy framework that should guide its choices and behaviour regarding the African and international peace and security terrain. Rectifying this situation calls for the coordination and harmonisation of its (draft) foreign policy, (draft) defence policy, and (draft) national security policy frameworks and the harmonisation of such an integrated foreign and security policy framework with several domestic policy imperatives.

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