

Shaping Africa's Peace and Security Partnerships for the 21st Century

BY AMANDA J. DORY

The release of white balloons around Berlin's perimeter served as a vivid symbol for the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall -- a key moment as the Cold War came to an end. In Africa, perhaps unsurprisingly, there have not been commemorations to mark the Cold War's conclusion nor its superpower proxy conflicts that served to disrupt the process and progress of African post-colonial development. The majority of African states now have 50 years of experience in self-governance, following the wave of independence occurring in the 1960s. (There are of course outliers such as the never-colonized Ethiopia and Africa's newest state, South Sudan, now three years old.) Africans and their governments have spent the last 25 years forming their states amidst the considerable challenges and opportunities afforded by the globalization of commerce, communications, and technology rather than the polarized international dynamics of the Cold War.

The trinity of governance, economic development, and security as interlocking elements required for nation-building has become a well-accepted formula during this period, to include the recognition that security is a pre-requisite for the other elements to flourish. All these elements are interdependent and must advance for success. A quick tour d'horizon indicates forward progress over the last half-century across each of these elements in much of Africa.

- **GOVERNANCE.** Existing within borders inherited from colonial powers, and subsequently affirmed by the Organization of African Unity (the predecessor of today's African Union or AU), African peoples and governments today are still in the formative stages of advancing national identities and institutions. Post-colonial African states face substantial challenges to state formation and consolidation efforts as well as to defending their territorial integrity. In the context of unprecedented flows of information, goods, and people across long and often unsecured borders, this difficult work is advancing in the face of centrifugal forces and without the luxury of time. On the positive side, of the 54 countries in Africa, the majority now hold regular elections, although in many countries a single party dominates. As noted by the United Nations

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(UN), “Overall, Africa has made progress, with some indicators – such as respect for human rights and the rule of law, legislative capacity, civil society engagement and civil liberties – generally increasing. However, democracy remains vulnerable, and requires greater institutional and procedural certainty to be consolidated.”¹

■ **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.** At a macro level, African countries weathered the recent global recession reasonably well, with continental economic growth projections at 4.8 percent for 2014, and 5.7 percent for 2015, to include growth in domestic demand.² African economies remain primarily providers of raw materials – whether export crops or extractive industries – with

value-added processing happening elsewhere. At the level of the individual, however, about half of Africans still survive on less than \$1.25 per day. After decades of development investment, ambitious UN Millennium Development Goals that are indicators of human security are not on track to be fulfilled by the 2015 goal in many African states that started from a lower point of departure relative to other regions of the world.³

■ **SECURITY.** In the security arena, following South Africa’s transition from apartheid to democratic rule in the mid-1990s, southern Africa, in particular, has been a region of relative peace and stability. Similarly, in this same timeframe, post-colonial internal and



SASOL gas pipeline in Temane, Mozambique

cross-border conflicts have subsided in West Africa, for example in Sierra Leone and Liberia. In other regions, however, longstanding conflicts have continued, especially in Central Africa.

In an echo of the Cold War proxy conflicts in Africa, in some cases, today's conflicts on the continent are being fanned by external actors, especially non-state entities. In the Maghreb, what began as an indigenous Jasmine Revolution (Arab Spring) in Tunisia against an authoritarian leader unable to deliver economic benefits to the general population, then spread to Libya and Egypt, with less dramatic reverberations in Morocco and Algeria. In today's globalized world, these events were communicated in real-time within the region and to the international community. Three years post-revolution, the free flow of individuals across borders has resulted in both the inflow to North Africa of those seeking to capitalize on socio-economic tensions to advance more extreme ideological agendas, as well as the outflow of several thousand alienated individuals who have become "foreign fighters" in Syria and Iraq. For those not consumed by the conflicts they are joining, their eventual return and potential to radicalize others in their countries of origin poses a serious threat.

In the Sahel region, the Lake Chad Basin, and the Horn of Africa, longstanding grievances among ethnic groups over power and access to resources are being influenced by external actors with a variety of agendas as well. Until recently, al-Qaeda has been the most prominent outside extremist influence, forging connections of varying degrees with indigenous groups in all directions. These include the Algeria-origin al-Qaeda in the

Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the north, the Somalia-origin al-Shabaab in the east, and the Nigeria-based Boko Haram in the west. The growth in the number of terrorist incidents globally, in particular from 2010, is mirrored in Africa. As reflected in the University of Maryland's Global Terrorism Database, incidents in Africa more than tripled from approximately 300 in 1989, to more than 1400 in 2012. In the early 2000s, only Algeria appeared on the global top 10 list for the largest number of attacks. By 2007, Algeria had been replaced by Somalia, and in 2013, Nigeria and Somalia were in the eighth and ninth position, globally.⁴

The rapid geographic advances accomplished by the Islamic State in Syria and the Levant (ISIL) in Syria and Iraq in 2014 may also lead to additional traction in ISIL's outreach campaigns in Africa, setting up an ideological competition with al-Qaeda for influence with indigenous African extremist groups. Some groups are already beginning to take sides, as in the case of Boko Haram, which has aligned with the ISIL camp. In an alternative scenario, if the al-Qaeda franchise and ISIL manage to find common cause as was recently reported in Syria, this could pose an increasingly potent and unified alternative to those who are disaffected or lack better choices.

Combating a new era of conflicts inflamed by outsiders will significantly test Africa's citizens, states, regional organizations, and external supporters. As articulated by the African Union, there is a continental imperative to develop "African solutions to African problems." Africa's partners, to include the United States, recognize and support this imperative. At the same time, however, some of today's most pressing problems are transnational in nature – including organized crime and illicit

trafficking, violent extremism, pandemic disease, and climate change – and do not lend themselves to resolution at national or even continental scales. Even as the AU’s peace and security architectures make important advances, such as measured progress in establishing regional stand-by forces and the newly invigorated concept of a rapidly deployable crisis response capability, the threats to peace and stability in Africa are evolving faster than these architectures, capabilities, and doctrines are coalescing.

For Africa and its partners, the 21st century requires different approaches in order to seize opportunities and manage threats to national and human security. Key characteristics include:

- **Rapid assessment and response:** Whether facing competitors or threat vectors, individuals, nation-states, or organizations require information fused from multiple sources and coupled with competent analysis in order to enable timely stakeholder decisions. “Stakeholders” must be viewed broadly, consistent with the AU’s evolution from an earlier focus on sovereign non-interference to its more recent articulation of collective non-indifference.
- **Scalability:** Responses must be designed with the capacity to scale or ramp up – from the local or village level to regional, national, or multi-national echelons; and
- **Flexible, multi-dimensional approaches:** Whether manmade or natural, threats adapt asymmetrically or mutate over time seeking advantage. Effectively countering them requires a level of flexibility and coordination across sectors that national and international institutions struggle to achieve.

The multi-faceted, international response to the outbreak of the Ebola virus in multiple West African countries that began in mid-2014 is a good example of the new type of challenge facing Africa and demonstrates the relevance of these characteristics. Affected countries and responders at first struggled to fuse data from an array of local and national sources to determine the nature and scope of the outbreak in order to develop a blueprint for national and international response. Feedback loops between local and national authorities, supplemented by external expertise, have been critical to developing preventive information campaigns and responsive treatment approaches. Coordination among elected officials, health providers, and security forces at all levels – local, national, and international – has been a continuous imperative and daily effort in order to apply resources to save lives and forestall additional infections in a dynamic environment. Additionally, in order to scale up the response, local and external security forces, to include U.S. and European military forces, have been mobilized to support the massive humanitarian health intervention in the absence of sufficiently robust civilian options.

In contrast to the fast-moving Ebola outbreak and response mobilization, other types of transnational threats are manifesting at a more gradual pace, although they similarly thrive in an enabling environment where governance, state institutions, and economic opportunity are weak. The slow, deliberate process of state formation that has taken centuries in other parts of the globe must begin to move faster in Africa if African states are to outpace those forces that seek to undermine or even displace existing national authorities and institutions. Some social science research indicates that on a global basis, younger

democracies experience higher rates of terrorism than those that have survived for 50 years or more, suggesting the importance of institutional maturity. Improved governance and more inclusive politics are therefore critical elements not only to reinforce still nascent practices of democratic governance, but potentially to counter radicalization as well.

Economic growth, investment, and the generation of legitimate employment opportunities must also scale up in tandem to match Africa's growing and youthful population. In the globalization context, the security-governance-development trinity must also be supplemented with compelling and uniting national narratives that can combat extremist ideologies. Since the end of the Cold War, few countries in either the developing or the industrialized world have developed explanations to their own people that describe their economic approach, and political platforms typically fail to make meaningful policy-based distinctions or arguments.⁶ In an era of ubiquitous communication, this gap must be filled.

African neighbors and regions must work in greater partnership to address threats to peace and security that do not respect borders. Just as oceans or seas do not serve as a buffer in a globalized world, neither does the vast distance from one end of Africa to the other. While the Maghreb and Sahel are thousands of miles from the countries of Central and Southern Africa, all nations must assess their vulnerabilities realistically, especially considering the status of youth and disaffected populations, and take action where required. Recent events in Burkina Faso that saw a youthful, student-led population make a successful stand against a long-serving president pursuing constitutional revisions to stay in power have the potential to influence governance practices

in other countries in the region and beyond. Finally, internal African capacity-building efforts must be more effectively coordinated with those sponsored by external supporters.

An often-quoted African proverb observes that in order "to go quickly, go alone; to go far, go together." Adjusting for the realities of the 21st century, to include the continuing importance of partnerships coupled with the need for swifter mobilization to address threats to peace and security in Africa, an updated version might instead emphasize the imperative "to go far – we must go both quickly and together." **PRISM**

NOTES

¹ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), African Governance Report III, Elections & the Management of Diversity, 2013, p. 6.

² African Development Bank, OECD, African Economic Outlook, 2014, p. 22

³ UNECA, MDG Report 2014: Assessing Progress in Africa Toward the Millennium Development Goals. Oct. 31, 2014.

⁴ National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). University of Maryland Global Terrorism Database at <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/globe/index.html>

⁵ Joe Eyerman cited in "Democracy and Terrorism: A Complex Relationship" by James Piazza for International Relations and Security Network (ISN), May 14, 2014. <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail?id=179658>

⁶ Greg Mills and Jeffrey Herbst, "Africa's Third Liberation," Penguin Books, 2012, p. 22.