

On the State of Peace and Security in Africa

BY OLUSEGUN OBASANJO

Recent developments and security threats in Mali, Central African Republic and Nigeria are alarming. And we cannot forget South Sudan and the endless conflicts in Somalia and the Great Lakes. The African Union (AU), at its 50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration, pledged not to bequeath to future generations of Africans a legacy of wars and conflicts, by silencing the guns by 2020. But 2020 is around the corner. What is the way out of this situation?

Background to Today's Security Concerns

The African continent has no doubt witnessed many transformations in the last several decades, ranging from advances in the use of communication technology, to rapid economic growth triggered by an expanding market for Africa's commodities, and a burgeoning youth population able to innovate in this environment. At the same time, our potential to translate these transformations into stable peace and development for African people is hampered by the continuing threat of armed conflict, along with its transmutations. Armed conflicts have become a recurrent reality in Africa since independence.

From 1960 until the present day, fifty percent of Africa's states have been ravaged by one form of conflict or another. The post-Cold War conflict resurgence is particularly disturbing. Peace and security scholars have attempted to classify armed conflicts on the continent into various categories – some of which understandably only feature in our discourses in a historical sense. Categorization at this point is necessary, if only as an indication of how far we have come as a continent.

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- *Post-colonial conflicts* arising from agitations for liberation from the control of colonial settlers in countries such as Zimbabwe (1980); Namibia (1990); and apartheid in South Africa (1994).
- *Boundary and territorial conflicts* such as the Angolan Bush War in South Africa (1966-1989); the Algeria–Morocco conflict over the Atlas Mountain area (1963); the territorial tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea (1998–2000); the Kenya–Somali war (1963–67); the Somali–Ethiopian conflict (1964–78); the Egypt–Libya conflict (1977); and the Cameroon–Nigeria conflict over the disputed Bakassi Peninsula (1994) – the settlement of which I was part of.
- *Conflicts linked to secessionist ambitions* such as the case of Sudan and South Sudan (1983–2011); the age-long Cassamance rebellion in Senegal; the Cabinda agitations in Angola; and the Biafra civil war in Nigeria (1967–70).
- *Resource-based conflicts* such as the Sudan and South Sudan conflict over the Abyei region; the Congo-Brazzaville conflict (2007); the Senegal/Mauritania conflict (1989); and the conflict raging in eastern Congo over the last decade.
- *Identity-based conflicts* such as inter-ethnic or inter-tribal conflicts. Examples of these are the 1994 Rwandan Genocide; the Burundi massacres; the Tuareg uprising in Mali; clan fighting in Somalia and Liberia; Algerian Berbers fighting against the ruling Arab class in Algeria; and the ongoing South Sudan conflict.
- *Annexationist conflicts* such as the occupation of the Western Sahara by Morocco in 1975; and British Southern Cameroons in 1961.

- *Poverty, denial and perceived or real injustice induced conflicts* like the militancy in the Niger Delta of Nigeria or the current Boko Haram insurgency.

Even though a substantial decline in the occurrence of inter-state conflicts, including many of those mentioned above, was experienced in the 1990s, an alarming rise in the number of intra-state conflicts, and what some scholars refer to as “new wars” in their various forms and shades, is taking place. By nature, these conflicts tend to be more intense and intractable. They range from large-scale warfare to low intensity conflicts; and of late we have seen how public protests and people’s movements can set off a chain of violent, even if transformative events. Over the past years, countries such as Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Ethiopia- Eritrea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, Mali, Central African Republic, and Nigeria have witnessed one form of escalating conflict or another with their attendant consequences. Some of these countries are still undergoing heart-wrenching episodes of violence at the moment. The gory events of the last month of 2013 in South Sudan and the horror witnessed on the streets of Bangui in Central African Republic attest to this and, in my view, should challenge our resolve as Africans to silence the guns in these places forever.

Further additions to these are growing and menacing terrorist activities and insurgencies taking place in Somalia, Mali, Kenya, and North Eastern Nigeria to date. In some respects, these conflicts and forms of insecurity are not as new as some peace and security scholars might claim. For one, their root causes

and triggers are not necessarily new. We have long spoken about the structural violence that underlines armed conflict. The Constitutive Act of the AU pays particular attention to this. We have also noted that the triggers of these conflicts are numerous and interwoven. Several are worth highlighting.

Triggers

Politically, poor governance, state building processes such as the struggle for control of power, and unconstitutional changes of government remain key conflict drivers. Economically, corruption, struggle for ownership, management and control of natural resources, as well as unequal distribution of these resources constitute major factors that trigger conflicts across the continent. Socially, inadequate capacity for diversity management, the real or perceived inequality and discrimination against minorities, marginalization along ethnic and religious lines as well as the alienation and consequent disillusionment of the youth are further additions. Internationally, colonial legacies, and foreign interference in political transition and governance have equally triggered conflicts.

But what is indeed new is the pattern of mutation of old conflicts. As a result we sometimes see their manifestation in more extreme forms of militancy. To be certain, this extreme expression of violence is not the unique preserve of Africa. However, while it is tempting to conclude that what we are experiencing is copycat stealing of “narratives” from all over the world, we must reflect on how deeply militant groups believe in those narratives. Initial evidence suggests that despite a copycat method of expression, these are reactions to local rather than global conditions. We now know that we cannot ignore the “power of

Africa’s streets” both in its violent and non-violent manifestations. The phenomenon in which largely young populations take to the streets to voice their feelings of exclusion through mass non-violent protests; and another phenomenon in which a form of socialization causes young people to throw bombs on themselves and are ready to kill deserves closer attention. As a result we see the threat landscape changing. We therefore must ask ourselves whether this threat landscape is changing fundamentally and whether we are still looking at the right framework for addressing the breadth of security challenges confronting the continent.

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The consequences of conflicts, in their various manifestations, on state, human, and collective security, are enormous. It is therefore imperative for African leaders to muster the necessary resolve and determination to ensure that these deadly conflicts and their negative

consequences on our citizens become a thing of the past.

Politically, Africa's ability to establish secure, democratic, and economically prosperous states is being hampered. State institutions and infrastructures are eroded, thereby undermining the integrity of the state. Formal economies have collapsed, giving room for the rise of shadow states where warlordism, impunity, and criminality thrive.

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Socially, the humanitarian dilemma across the African continent is huge. The incalculable loss of human lives, the damage to material infrastructure and environmental resources and the massive flows of refugees and internally displaced persons is a scar on our conscience.

Economically, the loss of income and assets, damage to infrastructure, diversion of resources from socio-economic development to peacekeeping, collapse of trading systems, cuts in social spending and capital flight, are some of the negative consequences of these armed conflicts.

Our actions as decision makers, private stakeholders and civil society should complement the relentless efforts of national governments, the AU, regional economic communities, and the international community on the prevention, management and resolution of these conflicts.

National governments have adopted several measures, policies, and initiatives to enhance peace and security in affected countries. At the regional level, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has, in accordance with the Constitutive Act of the AU, consistently condemned unconstitutional changes of governments in the region, imposed sanctions against defaulting member states, and facilitated mediation processes in these conflicts. It has deployed peacekeepers and human rights observers to conflict affected countries. The Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has also intervened in resolving conflicts in Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia.

At the continental level, the African Union, since its transformation from the OAU to the AU in 2001, embarked on a paradigm shift from its principle of non-interference to a principle of non-indifference and the right to intervene. Guided by the principle of "African solutions to African problems" the AU has taken significant actions to enhance peace and security in the continent. The adoption of the Protocol Relating to the establishment of the Peace and Security Council, in December 2003, and its framework for conflict-prevention, management, and resolution in Africa – the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) – are commendable.

The AU has undertaken several peacekeeping missions in Burundi, Comoros, Somalia, Darfur, and Central African Republic with significant results. Also worth mentioning are the evolving AU Agenda 2063, which places balancing state and human security as one of its core priorities, the African Common Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda which explores the interconnectedness between peace, security and sustainable development,

and the African Governance Architecture (AGA) which aims at promoting good governance for sustainable peace and security.

At the global level, the United Nations has supported the restoration of peace and security in Africa through the adoption of various resolutions, which established peacekeeping missions across the continent. These efforts have been furthered by financial and technical support from various development partners and non-state actors across the globe.

Will these efforts be enough to eradicate conflict by 2020? Certainly not! We need to do more. Much also depends on our ability to engage in hard collective thinking and “horizon scanning” in ways that enable us to inject flexibility when required, into our existing response frameworks. The Tana High Level Forum on Security in Africa offers an important contribution to a process of collective thinking. If we must achieve sustainable peace in Africa, the following non-negotiable priorities to fast-track the implementation of already existing mechanisms are of utmost importance:

Priorities for Peace

- Democracy and good governance must form the basis for management of affairs in every country in Africa. Peace, security and good governance are fellow passengers.
- African leaders and decision-makers must reaffirm their commitment in terms of resources, and demonstrate the political will required to ensure the operationalization of an African-owned APSA. “African solutions” will ring hollow if we fail to fund our initiatives and programs.
- The implementation of the African Governance Architecture must be accorded the needed priority as APSA and AGA are

two sides of one coin. While AGA focuses on broader questions of governance, APSA places emphasis on the mechanisms for conflict management, resolution, and peace-building. These two must work together to bring about peace and security in the continent.

- All components of APSA should be equally implemented for a more coherent and comprehensive approach to managing peace and security in Africa.
- African stakeholders – government, private sector, and civil society – must make concerted efforts to support existing mechanisms and initiatives, building strong infrastructure of government and viable institutions.

A pivotal moment is now upon us. The long-running debate on achieving sustainable peace and security in Africa is like running a marathon. Implementing existing frameworks and initiatives will require resilience, dedication, resources, and patience; perhaps more patience than we would like. We must all set our minds and put our hands together to achieve this imperative order for Africa.

In the words of the late South African President Nelson Mandela, “It always seems impossible until it’s done.” Let us press on in this conviction therefore – strongly and consistently, towards our goal of achieving sustainable peace and human security in our dear continent, Africa. **PRISM**