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Quo Vadis APSA? The Future of the African Peace and Security Architecture

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2017 was a special year for Germany's Africa policy. The African continent was at the focus of political attention more than once, and the Federal Government launched a large number of major initiatives. Germany, holding the presidency of the G20 group, invited numerous African heads of state and government to the summit in Hamburg. For the first time in its history, the G20 featured Africa as a regional priority and in this context established a new political partnership with Africa. The Marshall Plan with Africa, presented in early 2017 by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, aims to bring about a paradigm shift in cooperation with African countries that will focus on the people and facilitate direct investments. Africa therefore seems to be gaining in importance on the political agenda. This raises a number of questions: Where are we now in terms of peace and security – factors of paramount importance to development and economic growth – on the African continent? Is the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) prepared for current and future security challenges? And why should Germany continue to care about APSA, aside from what some observers are calling a new “hype” about Africa?

The most recent visit by Chancellor Angela Merkel and Development Minister Gerd Müller to various African countries in August 2018 shows that the continent continues to play a major role in the foreign, security, and development policy of the German government. Indeed, these visits to a continent that is composed of a diverse group of 54 countries with different challenges on the one hand, and plenty of opportunities on the other, reflect the growing attention towards Africa. Perhaps more importantly, they signal a changing posture, which is characterised by not merely talking about Africa, but by intentionally talking with Africa as a partner of equal standing. While migration to Europe seems to continue to be the main driver in the cooperation with various African countries, economic development and improvement of business conditions have become key features of German Africa policy. Private investments and better trade relations between African countries and the European Union can stimulate economic growth and revive the labour market, while development cooperation can help promote a business-friendly environment.

Creating job perspectives for the young generation is vital in mitigating migration and keeping the much-needed innovative and intellectual potential in the African countries. At the same time, improving security remains a key pillar in German support both on a bilateral level and through the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In terms of security cooperation, the African Union (AU) is one of Germany's most important partners on the continent. The AU's African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) is the African framework concept for crisis management, conflict resolution and peacekeeping. Yet the question remains to what extent APSA and the support it receives from Germany are adequately positioned to respond to current and future threats on the African continent, especially in terms of conflict resolution and preventive action.

The evolution of an African Peace and Security Architecture

The African countries have made great progress in reducing the number of violent conflicts since the end of the Cold War, despite a slight increase in more recent times. Simultaneously, however, the nature of security threats has changed substantially over the past years. This includes, among other things, a rising level of popular protests and riots across Africa. Furthermore, transnational and, in particular, Islamist terrorism as well as organised crime are growing threats, especially in North Africa, across the Sahel region and at the Horn of Africa. Violent conflicts and crises have emerged from various forms of grievances and frustrations, most notably driven by unmet socio-economic needs, negative impacts of climate change and population growth. Yet, in today's world, a world that is globally connected, there are no "African problems". At least since the migration crisis in 2015, Europe and Germany have realised that "problems" on the African continent can easily translate into major challenges at home and directly affect life in the EU. Accordingly, there is a strong, long-term connection between the two continents.

However, responding to current security challenges is not an easy task given their complex nature and the underlying dynamics that result in a rapidly changing security environment. The African Peace and Security Architecture, established in 2004 under the umbrella of the African Union, is the central framework encompassing a set of institutions, legislations and mechanisms for peace and security on the African continent. To make peaceful and sustainable development possible, APSA pools various instruments that contribute to conflict resolution and stabilisation in Africa. Ten regional organisations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), play a vital role in APSA contributing resources, personnel and expertise. Since the establishment of APSA, the AU and regional organisations have made significant progress in terms of peace and security by deploying peacekeeping operations as well as election observer missions, and by engaging in conflict mediation, despite setbacks in some parts of the continent. Overall, African capabilities regarding the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts have grown substantially. Many interventions conducted by the AU and RECs have been successful or partially successful in either preventing or de-escalating conflicts. However, almost 15 years after the establishment of APSA, there are still a number of major challenges and shortcomings with respect to the APSA instruments.

The African Standby Force – Growing uncertainty on the horizon

The best-known instrument, apart from mediation, preventive diplomacy and early warning, is the African Standby Force (ASF). The AU created the Standby Force over ten years ago in cooperation with the continent's five largest regional economic communities. By leading mediation efforts and peacekeeping missions, such as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the United Nations-African Union Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), the AU is working to bring peace to the continent. And although the AU and regional organisations have successfully contributed to resolving conflicts and establishing peace in some areas (for instance with their 2016 mediation efforts in Gambia under the leadership of ECOWAS), the future of APSA and especially of the ASF is more uncertain than ever – for at least two reasons.

The **first key challenge** arises from the limited availability of resources, because the ASF is dependent on the contributions of its RECs. Specifically, achieving full operational capability, readiness and independence has been hampered by deficits in administration, logistics and financial sustainability. In contrast to the military and police components, the civilian component for deploying specialists in peacekeeping missions is still underdeveloped, despite notable efforts by the African Union and the RECs. There are not enough experts appropriately qualified and trained for deployment. In addition, there are enormous discrepancies across the continent concerning the speed at which qualified personnel is assigned. The AU has tried to coordinate the process, but has limited powers, as the RECs enjoy a high degree of freedom in this respect. The training and participation of women in peacekeeping missions is another pivotal area that deserves much more political attention, and which should be enforced at the operational level, as women are evidently instrumental in encouraging peaceful development. In fact, a far greater effort will be required to successfully implement the

corresponding UN Resolution 1325. Furthermore, the reliance on pledged troop contingents from the RECs and their dependence on their member states puts additional pressure on the ASF. The focus of institutional security engagements already seems to be shifting away from the ASF towards other security mechanisms. At the same time, the relevance of UN missions has remained unchanged. Due to their reimbursement system, these missions cover significant parts of the defence budgets of those African countries that contribute troops. Against this background and in view of the current shortage of resources, it is unlikely that the troop-contributing countries will withdraw their military personnel from financially lucrative UN missions and support the ASF instead.

The **second key challenge** for the ASF arises from the evolution of new and partially competing ad-hoc security arrangements outside the APSA framework. In fact, recent developments on the continent are raising doubts as to whether the ASF is really an appropriate instrument or concept to intervene in future conflicts at all. Its strength lies in the multi-dimensional approach that intentionally combines military, police and civilian components. It seems, however, that a number of African countries prefer mechanisms that primarily suit their own national interests and allow a more rapid response. Ad-hoc coalitions, such as the one fighting the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, or the Nigerian-led Multi National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad area, are proving to be much more effective militarily than other operations on the continent, and they have also led to quick successes. In addition, political attention and limited financial resources are being focused on the G5 Sahel, for instance, in the fight against terrorism and organised crime in the Sahel region. This raises the question whether purely military solutions are becoming the preferred method for achieving seemingly rapid resolutions to conflicts, to the extent that they are essentially replacing the ASF with its multi-dimensional character, which is intentionally civilian.

But this is not the only problem created by the competing structures. Regional organisations with a clear security mandate, such as G5 Sahel and the ad-hoc coalitions, have also created coordination problems. The overlapping membership of some countries, the mandates of regional organisations, as well as the AU's poor coordination work remain problematic. Although stronger coordination is needed from the regional through to the national level, and even up to the AU and its decision-making body, the Peace and Security Council (PSC), there has clearly been a lack of political will to draw on available capacities. Divisions among AU member states on how to position themselves regarding violent conflicts are largely determined by national and regional political interests. While APSA has been established as a platform for a continent-wide approach to conflict resolution, current developments tend to favour national or regional solutions, leaving the AU partially sidelined and undermining the effectiveness of APSA and its instruments. The question then remains to which extent APSA can be used as a forum to bridge gaps between heterogeneous national interests. Nigeria, South Africa or (in future) Ethiopia could play key roles as the continent's most powerful countries. However, these countries face various internal conflicts and diverse political challenges that limit their room for manoeuvre in contributing to peace and security on the continent. In addition, there are reasonable doubts regarding whether and to what degree all other countries would accept their leading role. Given these difficult circumstances, and as a precondition for joint action and the appropriate use of the various instruments, a first key step would be to develop a shared understanding of security threats. The AU could provide the necessary framework and the platform for this crucial discussion.

The future of APSA and Germany's role

Despite the shortcomings and the pressure that rests on the African Union, APSA remains indispensable for peace and security on the continent. Regardless of the enormous effort to become more independent by introducing a continent-wide fee to finance APSA, the AU and APSA will continue to remain dependent on external support. Germany should continue to be a reliable partner for the AU and support the development of military, police and civilian capacities for the ASF. At the same time, support for mediation and diplomacy as well as early warning should also be strengthened to prevent these areas from falling behind. The development of capacities within the AU is even more important today.

Overall, there are **four dimensions** that deserve consideration when it comes to supporting APSA in the future:

1. While APSA continues to have notable shortcomings, turning the principle of non-interference, which characterised the pre-AU period, into a shared credo of non-indifference does represent a major paradigm shift. This also shows a fundamentally new approach and must be seen as a profound statement by all 54 African countries concerning their willingness to assume responsibility for the pressing security challenges on their continent. Current developments are fuelling the debate over the definition and understanding of security and the requirements for regional security systems. In Africa, a particularly broad interpretation of “security” is used and there are different concepts in this respect. Further discussion and an agreement on what is meant by “security” – military security, free elections, human security, or all of these together – is a precondition for any effective joint activities. And this debate must not be carried out purely at the academic level. In practice, the motive determining the activities of African countries in the area of security policy should always be to uphold democratic principles, and the AU must be prepared to intervene wherever necessary. This includes overcoming political disputes, developing a common understanding and putting pressure on states that try to prevent joint political action in the various committees of the AU and the RECs.

2. Since the inception of APSA, it is not only the world at large, but especially the security environment on the African continent that has become even more complex and challenging. This means even stronger efforts in terms of national, regional and international cooperation and coordination are necessary, in addition to a genuine African commitment. While the establishment of new regional organisations, such as G5 Sahel and ad-hoc coalitions, including the MNJTF, are an expression of an African commitment to find “African solutions for African problems”, these new initiatives call into question the continent-wide approach to conflict resolution. APSA should certainly not be abandoned. Instead, new modes of cooperation and meaningful interfaces should be developed alongside established security mechanisms and new initiatives. As Germany supports APSA and various other mechanisms, it should promote an inclusive approach and help to enable better consultation and cooperation between these various instruments. In addition, Germany should promote a focus on capacity-development within the AU and the RECs to ensure the operability of these organisations and long-term financial independence from external sources of support.

3. Germany should not accept the current emphasis on (quick) military solutions. Stability in Africa is more than the absence of violent conflicts and requires a holistic approach that takes a multitude of aspects into account. Economic development and income-generating jobs for the predominantly young African population are crucial for peaceful development. The same applies to promoting human security and good governance. Germany’s efforts to mobilise private investment are a promising approach, although the primary responsibility remains with the African countries, who could, for example, create better business environments by improving their regulatory framework. This would help to attract foreign capital.

4. Germany is a long-standing partner of African (security) organisations and has been supporting not only APSA but also various RECs and capacity-development efforts at the national level. Despite the positive developments in the past, a greater effort and additional resources from the AU and the RECs will be necessary to identify crises at an early stage and, wherever possible, to prevent further escalation. Early warning mechanisms do not only require human resources, but also long-term financial funding. Security sector reform (SSR) requires a long-term commitment that goes beyond short trainings and equipment support, and it also requires a continuing effort to achieve better coordination between Germany’s ministries at various levels. The Marshall Plan with Africa initiated by the Federal Government sets out “a clear vision of how Africa, the AU and the RECs should be capable of solving conflicts and crises by themselves.” The aim of the plan is also to guide Germany’s commitment in Africa based on a comprehensive approach. Together with Berlin’s strategic guideline document “Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace” (adopted in 2017 following a comprehensive, cross-ministerial effort), the Marshall Plan with Africa can be instrumental and should be used as the key frame of reference to encourage joint interministerial actions in support of APSA.

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