SECURITY WITHOUT SABRE-RATTLING
COUNTERACTING INCREASED MILITARISATION IN AFRICA

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The theme of the last AU summit in Addis Ababa (22-29 January) was “Winning the Fight against Corruption: A Sustainable Path to Africa’s Transformation.” Echoing past summits, the summit concluded that Africa must be the caretaker of its own destiny and that corruption is a deep-rooted curse with severe implications for political transformation, development, peacebuilding and conflict resolution in many African countries. Although not directly related to military affairs, corruption must indeed be seen as an integrated part of AU’s peace and security agenda.

Military expenditure has increased globally over the past decade, and generally to a greater degree in Africa. According to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), military expenditure in Africa increased by 45 percent from 2008 to 2014, at constant prices and exchange rates. The average global increase, over the same time period, was 6 percent. This trend is in stark contrast to the pacifist vision the AU adopted in 2013 to “Silence the Guns” by 2020. A vision aimed at terminating conflicts across the continent.

With increased militarisation comes increased foreign involvement in the security affairs of many African states. Lack of resources, technology and military capacity in the AU and regional economic communities (RECs) has opened the door to external funding, capacity building, and external actor interventions. These

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Lack of resources makes the African Union dependent on external funding for military support and peacebuilding. Policy makers who want to support the AU and its members in their efforts to avoid becoming pieces in external powers’ geopolitical puzzle, should promote non-military solutions to security challenges.

MIKAEL ERIKSSON, Senior Researcher at the Nordic Africa Institute

Military expenditure in Africa is very low in a global comparison, but over the last decade it has been growing at a considerably higher pace than the global average, 45 percent compared to 6 percent from 2008 to 2014. The increase has been faster in North Africa than in Sub-Saharan Africa, 62 percent compared to 28 percent over the same time period.
Interventions take many different forms, ranging from joint military exercises, to troop deployment and the construction of semi-permanent military bases across the African continent.

Military solutions to non-security challenges
The reliance on external involvement in African security affairs comes at a high price. Firstly, it creates an asymmetry, with external states dominating the African security agenda. In this asymmetry African states lose the opportunity to shape their own destiny. Secondly, external actors tend to opt for quick military solutions in areas where they find a national interest rather than investing in long-term support addressing local concerns and root causes that they can engage with militarily. This goes for Western powers and agencies as well as non-Western states such as China, Russia and states in the Middle East. Thirdly, as research findings have shown, an increasing number of non-security-related challenges across the continent have tended to become militarised. For example, military forces have been used to address epidemics, local political riots, and development issues.

Moreover, political discourse is becoming more and more militarised all over the continent. For example, politicians are increasingly associating security issues with the fight against terrorism and regime security, as opposed to resilience of communities and human security. There are also many examples, across Africa, where external powers, although to some degree unintentionally, use a language of war and military threat when rallying support for development issues and peace promotion and the fight against diseases or climate change. Previously separate areas, such as development and security, are now melding into the same political agenda – and the universal solutions to all challenges in these arenas are military interventions.

Past pan-African debates
The pan-African movement and its ideological origins offer important perspectives on current AU security reform, involving paradigms that foreign actors often
miss. For generations, the movement has been engaged in a healthy debate on what African security is and in what way it could institutionally tackle insecurities across the continent. Two paradigms dominate: the short- and the long-term security perspectives.

In the short term, the understanding is that security is closely associated with conventional military interventions in response to wars, rebellions and terrorism. African governments and the AU have, as a rule, and not without well-founded reasons, seen strong military institutions as the primary answer to security issues. To address these security challenges, over the past two decades, the AU has been stepping up its institutions and instruments. Examples here include the creation of the African Standby Force, the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises, and various ad-hoc military arrangements, such as African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM).

In stark contrast to the short-term and more immediate hard security discourse are long-term security challenges that undermine the peace and stability of African states and societies. For instance, across Africa, as elsewhere, climate change presents a profound challenge. Access to food, fresh water and clean air is gradually becoming more difficult, because of pollution, competition for resources and climate variation. To guard against these effects, the AU needs to invest heavily in adaptation, not least in terms of smart infrastructure and viable social support mechanisms.

Other long-term security challenges include illiberal practices, such as third-mandate governance prolongations, corruption, and regime protection by African political elites and their external collaborators. Politicians are extending their mandates, ignoring norms enshrined in the Constitutive Act of the African Union. Corruption is eating its way into public life, thereby also undermining citizens’ trust in public and security governance regimes. In several African states, politicians are close to armed groups or organised crime syndicates. This is gradually building into an enormous security-re-
lated concern for the entire AU project. While Africa is not unique in this regard, compared to other regions of the world, it has its own sets of challenges that are uniquely profound.

How then can we understand this growing trend of militarization, and how should Africa build on its past?

**From human dignity to Pax Africana**

We can trace the process of improving institutional responses to security challenges in Africa back to the early days of pan-Africanism. African leaders have vacillated between a human security approach (i.e. security for the African peoples and communities) and conventional hard security for African states and regimes.

In the early twentieth century, the pan-African movement mainly conceived of security as a matter of bringing together the African diaspora under a shared identity and human dignity. The slave trade, political representation and what we today define as human rights, were at the core of the pan-African “human security” movement.

The pan-African movement’s thinking on peace and security changed and became more of a debate over the kind of security posture Africa collectively should take. Many leading pan-Africanists particularly came to articulate this process after the Second World War, in the early days of decolonisation. At the time, pan-African scholars explicitly began to relate to the notion of security by, for example, speaking of a Pax Africana.

As an illustration, first president of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah’s conception of pan-African security, suggested the security of the African continent was crucial for the survival of young African states. This contrasted with earlier ideas in the pan-African movement that focused on bringing the diaspora together and enhancing the dignity of Africans. Concern shifted from the individual to the state.

**Increased investment in counterterrorism**

Since the creation of the AU’s predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), in 1963, many African leaders have closely tied security to military security. An important driver of the security debate at the time was the cold war system, in which Africa increasingly became an arena for proxy confrontations between external actors.

A clear breaking point in the debate on African peace and security came in the 1990s, when the AU began to move away from its post-colonial security discourse. AU policy makers introduced human security as one of the core principles of Africa’s conception of security. Issues
such as human rights, democracy and peace were put on the agenda. Yet, in practice, the heads of the member states still saw the mandate to deal with peace and security as an exclusive domestic jurisdiction based on their interests.

While there were reasons to believe that the human security discourse might survive as a theme, the 11 September 2001 attacks, and the terrorism security discourse that followed, penetrated African debate and practice. Investment in counterterrorism structures grew immensely, in cooperation with Western powers.

The question now is where the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), the AU framework for conflict management and peacebuilding, is heading, in terms of its conceptualisation of security. Clearly, the AU’s understanding of security has developed considerably from that of the OAU.

Framed within different themes of continental integration, security will be at the heart of AU summits for years to come. Tensions among African leaders will continue to involve the question of which security institutions to invest resources in. By reformulating security discourses and practices, African leaders can address other long-term and non-conventional security concerns.

Conclusions and policy recommendations

- Donor countries and development organisations should consider, in a more holistic way, how their support to African governments, the AU and RECs, affect the continent’s security sector.
- External actors need to consider alternative ways to support Africa’s security sector, by investing in institutions that address root-causes of long-term security threats instead of military quick fixes.
- External actors seeking partnerships with the AU and its members need to recognise that African security discourses rest on a long debate within the pan-African movement that is far from over and that cannot be changed from abroad.
- The AU needs to democratize and make the involvement of African citizenry in its decision-making processes more transparent, so that human security concerns can progressively be brought to the core of the African security agenda.

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