



Wilton Park



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Report

The future of global peacebuilding: Africa

Monday 19 – Wednesday 21 March 2018 | WP1552

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As global security threats and their underpinning drivers evolve, the pressure for global peace and security governance arrangements to respond to and adequately deal with them has been increasing. Ongoing violent conflicts featuring non-state, state and transnational actors; severe human rights violations; migration and growing refugee flows; and the increased frequency of natural disasters are all challenges confronting the world.

These challenges will presumably be influenced by rapid demographic changes; technological innovations; globalisation; local responses; and climate change. Understanding the transformations that may come from these challenges is a critical step towards shaping a better and more sustainable future for global peacebuilding.

Africa occupies an important space in current global responses to the changing nature of threats to international peace and security and will remain an important actor in the global peacebuilding arena in the future. This meeting, the fourth in a series of conferences entitled African Perspectives on Peacebuilding, explored Africa's place in, and potential contributions to, the future of the global peacebuilding landscape. It draws on previous meetings that assessed evolving challenges, responses to peacebuilding in Africa; the development of African approaches to peacebuilding in response to the changing dynamics of conflict; and sustaining civil society engagement in peacebuilding. The event discussed the complexities embedded in ongoing changes in the world's peace and security terrain and examines their interaction with, and impact on, conflict dynamics and peacebuilding in Africa, as well as the continent's contribution to global conversations and actions on peacebuilding. In doing so, the participants considered the evolution of these global trends, addressing how they interact with and impact conflict dynamics and peacebuilding in Africa, its broader ramifications, and explored options with regard to Africa's vision and role alongside international partners in shaping the future of global peacebuilding.

The key objectives were to:

- Analyse Africa's current place in global peacebuilding, how global peacebuilding is impacting or affecting African approaches to

peacebuilding, and how African approaches to peacebuilding are incorporated in global policies and actions;

- Examine the nature and effectiveness of international partnerships on African peacebuilding, including the prospects on the continent;
- Draw upon lessons from comparative perspectives to enrich discussions on innovations in peace and security across Africa's sub-regions; and
- Develop a credible platform for policy-makers, practitioners and civil society actors to continue to discuss issues raised in the previous three Wilton Park meetings on new African peacebuilding approaches.

Key points

- The African (in)security landscape has been dominated by threats that include insurgencies seeking to control the state, communal conflicts, faith-based extremist movements and the militarised responses these ushered in;
- Drivers of insecurity and violence include: lack of institutionalisation of the African state, limited economic prospects underpinned by high unemployment, marginalisation and exclusion, demographic pressure and urbanisation;
- The global peacebuilding landscape, as manifested in and influenced by Africa, has been evolving with contradictory currents. At one level, there has been a call for greater inclusiveness, greater understanding of context, giving greater power for local actors outside the state and a search for balance between peace and justice. At another, there has been increasing trends of militarisation, authoritarian drift, nationalism and constriction of space for civil society engagement;
- This has led to competing notions of what peacebuilding entails ranging from peace through military driven stabilisation programmes that view stabilisation as peacebuilding; the drive to entrench liberal governance regimes (liberal peace); the aggressive pursuit of economic development disregarding liberal notions of political rights and freedom (illiberal peace); measures that have strong components of social justice and a range of variegated and localised practices of reconciliation (local peace);
- The balance between these contradictory trends and thus the future of peacebuilding will be influenced by a range of external dynamics and endogenous factors that would ultimately usher in peace and security outcomes that are difficult to anticipate. This includes technological and demographic shifts, climate change and the resurgence or otherwise of African agency both at leadership and mass level;
- While re-centralising youth in any discussion of peacebuilding is important, any such discussions need to balance youth creativity and transformative agency with their susceptibility to be blamed for engagement in violence. Youth diversity also needs to be appreciated;
- African and global actors need to enter into dialogue beyond the pursuit of country and institutional interests if peacebuilding is to make a difference to the lives of Africans and if global architecture and agendas for peace are to be reflective of Africans aspirations.

Nigeria: emerging threats and responses

Key points

- Nigeria has been bedevilled by a range of security threats ranging from insurgency and farmer-herder conflict to those motivated by criminality;
 - The responses of the Nigerian government, though combined with law and order, development, and reconciliation, has largely been dominated by the military.
1. The various regions of Nigeria are afflicted by different security threats with varying causes and ramifications. In the North East, the dominant source of insecurity has been the Boko Haram insurgency. More recently, the entire middle belt has been engulfed by conflict between farmers and herders. The Niger Delta states in the south are experiencing renewed oil-related insurgencies driven by longstanding grievances and sustained by organized crime.
 2. Drivers of instability vary from region to region: in the North East and North West, key sources of instability include demographic pressure and the lack of opportunities for the growing population; the decomposition of social and family life; the failure of the state to deliver services and the regionalisation of sources of threats. Farmer-herder conflicts have been largely driven by environmental pressure and the associated process of southward migration of pastoralists, the cultivation of pastoral routes by farmers and the failures of traditions of consultation over grazing arrangements. Whereas the security problem in the South's south is largely due to oil exploration processes and its environmental and social dynamics.
 3. As the nature and drivers of conflict vary across regions so do international, national and local responses. The North East has attracted wider national and international responses partly due to its trans-regional nature. Measures to stem insurgency include the formation of a Multinational Joint Task Force and its accompanying national civilian task force spearheaded by the Presidential Commission of Nigeria. On the other hand, the government seeks to deal with the herder-farmer conflict through a comprehensive solution that combines reconciliation initiatives with other law and order measures. In the South, the Ministry for the Niger Delta seeks to combine rule of law and development measures with community-centred initiatives.
 4. The government response has over-emphasized security measures to the exclusion of more holistic strategies. The stabilisation approach has meant that the military, which has been deployed to 32 of Nigeria's 36 states, has been at the forefront of any response. This is in part due to the failure of the police force to enforce order domestically.
 5. There is a glaring lack of institutionalised arenas for dialogue about longstanding grievances affecting Nigerians. To address this shortage, inclusive mechanisms for resolving both intra-community and state-community disputes are required. Evidence suggests that these such mechanisms build community resilience and make conflict less likely.
 6. Although community initiatives make achieving and sustaining peace more likely, they seem to be considered as an afterthought. The Nigerian government should capitalise on the community's capacity for peace. Addressing the drivers and consequences of instability requires comprehensive solutions. Partnership with and between local and intervening actors is vital, as is the coordination of efforts across borders in effectively addressing transnational conflicts.
 7. The response to insecurity in Nigeria must combine security, development, and humanitarian measures and manage the side-effects of the demographic explosion by expanding the state's capacity for service delivery.

African (in)security landscape

8. The African security terrain, while nuanced and constantly evolving, is dominated by five major types of conflict dynamics:
 - Conflicts driven by elites in a bid to control the state, including cases of relapse and other state-directed conflicts which feature prominently in countries such as South Sudan, Sudan and Burundi.
 - New and popular-based attempts to renegotiate state-society relations, exemplified by mass protests—in response to state neglect and a desire for improved living standards—that characterized the Arab Spring.
 - Geographically confined armed conflicts dominated by non-state actors which do not necessarily involve the state as a participant. These are often dubbed communal conflicts and are typically confined to peripheral parts of the state.
 - Faith based extremist movements and insurgencies, which have made significant gains over the past decade, defying notions of citizenship, statehood, and justice, and aided by their mastery of the local geographic and social and normative terrains. Their transnational linkages are particularly troublesome for states, and call for coordinated and well-integrated regional responses.
 - The increasingly militarised responses to instability post 9/11 are also contributing to insecurity in many parts of Africa. The distinction between stabilisation, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding, is increasingly blurred. While generalisation across the cases may not be warranted, most of these conflicts manifest themselves at the intersection of national borders often devoid of strong regulatory regimes. Not surprisingly, armed groups are increasingly relying on criminality and shadow economies to pursue their agenda.

Drivers of insecurity in Africa

9. The weak institutionalisation of the African state has generated grievances against the state and led to a failure to counter opportunistic armed groups. Corruption, misappropriation of humanitarian aid, and the overdependence on often ineffective militarised responses are manifestations of this weakness. Worryingly, improvement in governance across the continent has remained slow, while some countries are even experiencing an authoritarian drift.
10. Limited economic prospects against a backdrop of extreme poverty, unemployment and sense of marginalisation underpin many of these crises, from violence inspired by radicalism to state directed conventional civil war. While there has been an overall improvement in African economies measured by Gross Domestic Product, the extent to which this has improved the lives of Africans is questionable at best. While, in some countries there has been increased access to education, the same cannot be said about access to employment. In addition, many of the improvements in the provision of social services are achieved by compromising the quality of services delivered. Furthermore, the continent appears to be diverging, in that some countries are registering better outcomes while others regress. Economic transformation through increasing the competitiveness of the African economy at the global level will remain the major challenge of the Continent for the foreseeable future.
11. Demographic change in an economy that has limited absorptive capacity also presents its own potential security risk.
12. Rapid urbanisation in a context where the state is not able to deliver services may shift the dynamics of violence in the continent.

Evolution of responses and the quest for alternatives

13. While the concept and practice of peacebuilding in Africa is strongly contested, the different understandings of peacebuilding are not necessarily exclusive and can co-exist. A few prominent notions of peacebuilding on the continent include:
 - Liberal peacebuilding: liberal democratic institutions and market economics will lead to sustainable peace.
 - Militarized stabilisation missions as peacebuilding.
 - Peace premised on social justice: based on a belief that conflict is caused by unjust institutions, such as inequality and failure to address historical grievances and marginalisation.
 - Developmental peacebuilding: economic development in the context of authoritarianism. According to this model, disregarding liberal notions of political rights and freedom (illiberal peacebuilding), is justified with the aggressive pursuit of economic development.
 - Local peacebuilding: a range of variegated and localised practices of reconciliation and conflict resolution.
14. The trend towards militarised solutions to conflict resolution and peacebuilding has revealed a tension between military stabilisation activities and peacebuilding. While large-scale military involvement is often necessary for subduing “enemy combatants” that target civilians and pose an existential threat to the state, all too often the military is being asked to both stabilise and either aid /function as civil authorities. If this trend persists, policy makers must find ways to mitigate the negative consequences by exploring military operations that are more suitable to peacebuilding. This may involve rethinking how militaries are trained and re-evaluating the capacities that make for an effective military.
15. Africa has also made progress in developing its own peacebuilding structures, both under, and adjacent to the African Union’s *African Peace and Security Architecture* (APSA). There are however, several issues to be addressed.
 - There is a pressing need to build capacity for financing peacebuilding. External influence can undermine the effectiveness of regional organisations by pushing certain agendas and by limiting local buy-in and commitment. Without financing, there cannot be true ownership.
 - The APSA, as it is currently conceived, is incomplete and inflexible. Its operationalisation has stalled and the development of tangential frameworks such as the MNJTF and G5 Sahel (coalition of the willing)—which ostensibly perform its supposed function—indicates structural challenges that need to be addressed. Necessary measures include reducing its centralisation and rigidity.
 - Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms were intended to be the building blocks of the APSA. This now appears to have been based on a miscalculation which assumed homogeneity, mutual interests and ease of coordination among African states. The regional blocs are not adequately integrated into the AU framework. These pitfalls need to be addressed. It is important to recognize the divergent trends across Africa with respect to peacebuilding, governance, and the engagement of the various regional blocs in peace and security. ECOWAS for example, appears to be leading the way in strengthening norms and building capacity.

Some promising trends

16. The United Nations Sustaining Peace Agenda, spearheaded by UN Secretary General António Guterres, represents a positive development in the way peacebuilding is conceived, which may indicate improved policy and practice. The agenda is focused on sustaining peace “at all stages of conflict and in all its dimensions,” and on the imperative to prevent “the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict.” By putting prevention at the heart of peacebuilding, this new policy guideline represents a marked departure from previous more reactive and superficial approaches to peacebuilding, which did not conceive of peacebuilding as a process.
17. Earlier approaches had focused on symbolic achievements such as organising and overseeing elections in post-conflict states. This led to premature exits and conflict relapses, which precluded the development of sustainable peace. Providing technical solutions for fundamentally political problems undermines the possibility of long-term stability. The limits of the emphasis on “democratisation” narrowly construed, without contextual understanding, have become very clear.
18. These approaches also framed peacebuilding as a post-conflict phenomenon, as opposed to putting conflict prevention at heart of everything.
19. Peacebuilding at national and international levels had also been constructed as a process that gave primacy to people at the forefront of conflict, as opposed to considering those affected by conflict.
20. There is an increasing acknowledgement of the need for a “local turn” in peacebuilding based on the assessment that prioritizing local voices and ensuring local ownership will result in greater sensitivity to context, more inclusive initiatives, and increased local buy-in.
21. Many contemporary interventions are at the sub-national level and local communities are taking initiatives to find solutions to their own problems. There is also a greater push for inclusion and participation in the formal peacebuilding arenas shifting the balance, at least in some countries, towards a shared agenda backed by strengthening regional norms and frameworks, for example in the West African region (ECOWAS). Increased participation would shift peace activities from those currently based on ‘elite pact’ to peace based on shared consensus, through the forging of local social contracts and the utilisation of community resources and capacities for peace.
22. However, there are several questions and areas of contention that need further investigation and clarification. First, questions such as what is the ‘local’ in local peacebuilding, who is to be included, why and what constitutes ownership in peacebuilding are not still resolved. Second, how can it be possible that the local would be supported yet not co-opted? Third, how to make sure those notions of local capacity and community resilience are not just the fashions of the day? Fourth, what does engaging the local mean when the local has its own value and norms of inclusion and exclusion and its own politics of peace and justice?
23. While these are important ideological shifts they have not to date ushered in profound change in the global and regional peacebuilding architectures. These have, until now, remained top-down, driven by a focus on enabling the state to monopolise the means for violence. Even when global actors like the United Nations (UN) introduce some progressive measures, they are often difficult to adapt to local circumstances. Misunderstanding of local context by international partners, even when they seek to engage the local, is not uncommon. This notwithstanding, the evolution of the threat landscape, mainly the rise in extremist movement, the trans-nationalisation of threats, and ‘Task Force’ based mode of intervention constituted by ‘coalitions of the willing’, means that the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) structure and its

Regional Economic Communities (RECs) need to be adapted to evolving realities. Consequently, the peacebuilding architecture is neither institutionally equipped to deal with threats nor ideologically informed to respond to the evolving realities.

Countervailing trends

24. Another powerful current that is working against these realities is driven by developments at the global level. Powerful countries, such as the United States, appear to have prioritised counter-terrorism and political stability efforts to the detriment of respect for human rights, pursuit of social justice and accountability. In doing so they have remained overwhelmingly reliant on building the capacity of elite military units. Multilateralism as a solution to many of the security problems of Africa and the world, is being eroded or changing from within a context of uncertain consequences. Nationalism is also on the rise, mainly in Eastern and the Horn of Africa, with its own effect on the effectiveness of multilateral arrangements.
25. The growing military presence of global actors and the subsequent threats of re-colonisation of Africa has become another worrying trend. The emergence of new actors such as China, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, amongst others, is another trend that might work against the positive shift in the peacebuilding discourse. Finally, there is a strong current of home grown militarisation that has shifted scarce resources to the military, which is perceived to be the principal means of stabilisation and that has developed civilian like measures in a bid to achieve its non-military goals. This often manifests itself in tandem with the authoritarian drift of some countries and the constriction of space for civil society.

Factors shaping the balance between evolving trends

The future of peacebuilding in Africa will be influenced by a range of external and endogenous factors, the effects of which are difficult to anticipate. Some of these factors are technology, demographic shifts, and climate change and availability of reliable energy. As well as the resurgence or otherwise of African agency both at the leadership and grass roots level.

Technology

26. Major technological factors that will shape the future of peacebuilding in Africa include virtual realities, virtual possibilities and increasing reliance on Artificial Intelligence. At face value, these are double-edged swords: while they may not change human motivation and preference (peace instead of war or vice versa) they enable the agent mastering them to achieve its will in an efficient and effective way.
27. The increasing accessibility of modern digital communications has the potential to deepen empathy and understanding within and across communities, promote accountability, and fight injustice. The “Arab Spring” uprisings illustrate this application. However, as recent events have shown, these technologies are also double-edged swords which can be used to disseminate hate speech and subvert democracy.
28. Questions over who will, and should control these new technologies are important ethical and political questions that will shape peacebuilding priorities and effectiveness. It is unlikely that the state or multilateral bodies will be able to retain or even regulate control over the use of these technologies. Alternative interest groups such as non-state actors, corporations, and criminal groups have already, and will continue to take advantage of these technologies.
29. While some technologies seem to favour commercial interests, others may empower ordinary individuals. While they may generate a hybrid virtual community, they may also exclude certain groups and individuals. Hence, there is a need to scrutinise access to virtual spaces and the circumstance under which they enable either peace or violence and how they impact development.

30. The ways in which states and organisations adapt to future uncertainties will be crucial determinants of their resilience and their ability to promote peace. The evolving terrain requires African governments, corporations, and other institutions to improve their capacity to adapt to change — including future uncertainties — by developing policies and structures that make them more flexible and dynamic.

Demographic shift

31. The dominant narrative of Africa's demographic transition has been overwhelmingly pessimistic, with many predicting that the so-called "youth bulge" will result in disaster rather than dividends. Youth are often portrayed as a problem to be solved, which inevitably leads to reactive and short-sighted policies, rather than much needed comprehensive and long-term approaches.
32. Africa is not monolithic, the nature and extent of demographic changes varies significantly across the continent; in discussing policy proposals, more attention to the particularities of the various regions and countries is needed.
33. While much of the discussion of these developments focus on the quantitative demographic changes, the qualitative changes, with respect to how people organise and mobilise for social change, are just as important. The rise of female headed households for instance, is an important development, indicating a need to focus on increasing women's economic freedom.
34. Although fast-rising youth populations is often linked to the possibility of increased instability and violence, without a commensurate improvement of economic opportunities and expansion of service delivery this outcome is not inevitable. Governments can mitigate the effects of these changes. While certain parts of the world experience population decline, the potential of a large and dynamic workforce can and should be exploited.

Energy and climate change

35. According to UN assessments, Africa is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Increasingly erratic weather patterns will lead to more frequent droughts and a decrease in available arable land. It is imperative that Africa sources the necessary funding and technology, both internally and externally, to mitigate the effects of climate change and develop renewable energy resources. This may yet be insufficient to address the effects of climate change on social and political dynamics.
36. The trend towards alternative sources of energy will affect Africa's political economy, which may impact conflict dynamics in Africa considering that several African countries rank among the top producers of non-renewable natural resources.
37. Urgent measures should to be undertaken to understand energy and climatic trends and their peace and security consequences, as well as possible mitigating measures. More research on climate change, including vulnerability assessments, will help to model the potential varied impacts of climate change in Africa.
38. The response to climate change in Africa will require innovative technological, political, and legal strategies and frameworks. Some may include support for the development of drought resistant crops; new approaches to grazing rules to mitigate the ongoing farmer-herder conflict in West African and the Sahel; and a concerted campaign of reforestation carried out in a way that involves and benefits communities.

African agency

39. The assertiveness of African leaders and societies is an important factor in thinking about future peace and war. At present, African leaders seem to lack a national vision which informs their action and whenever a formal vision exists it does not inform government policy choices and priorities. Even countries that have the most progressive legal frameworks are enmeshed with pervasive violence often revealed

when actors express their grievances. If the #rememberkhwezi silent protest and HOLA Africa (a LGBTI digital platform) of South Africa indicate anything, it is the enduring nature of violence in putatively peaceful countries.

40. African leaders appear to lack assertion in their relations with the external world. The African agenda instead appears to be shaped by external geo-political interests, which are exemplified, for instance, by the African Union (AU) and external actors' responses to the Libyan crisis. Though relations between the UN and the AU or the UN and African states is couched in terms of partnership, the extent to which this is actually so is questionable partly due to the AU's lack of its own sources of funding. While African countries are not short of mass movements challenging the state, a continental peace movement still seems to be lacking. At the mass level, in various countries, there has been strong resistance against injustice and a call for social transformation. Hence, transforming this into a strong pan-Africanist current would be important.

African youth and the future of peacebuilding

41. Although often excluded from participation in formal peacebuilding processes, African youth have been at the centre of many of the conflict and peacebuilding discourses, including demographic change, violent extremism, mass uprisings, and social movements.
42. Present modes of youth engagement are often based on static, outdated notions about African youth which assume homogeneity and an inherent tendency towards violence. These attitudes risk deflecting responsibility for the genuine social, political, and economic conditions that lead youth to participate in violence.
43. The category "youth" is not monolithic. They differ in terms of their access to education, opportunity, and employment, and the way they respond to hardship. While some will be vulnerable to violence and extremism, this does not necessarily apply for all or even the majority of the youths.
44. Though the urge to be inclusive of youth in peacebuilding is a positive step, it needs to be pointed out that issues affecting youth cannot be isolated from wider environmental problems that leave young people susceptible to violence, both as victims and perpetrators.
45. Although Africa has seen economic growth in general, identifying who actually benefits from growth matters for the future of peace and stability. Opportunities for economic advancement and poverty alleviation must be the core societal responsibility of the state. International peacebuilding interventions have not been able to transform the economy of post-conflict countries and generate significant employment opportunities. Ignoring the economic aspect of peacebuilding harms youth in particular.
46. Thus, a critical marker of development in African states should be whether employment opportunities for the youth are improving. This will require comprehensive solutions such as reforming higher education by improving both access and quality.
47. As important as economic opportunities are, research has shown that material factors are not sufficient for achieving a contented and productive youth population. "Identity" and "narrative" are crucial for the development of well-adjusted youth. Exclusion therefore, both social and political, can undermine peace; this is evidenced by cases of radicalisation in countries and communities that are relatively prosperous, such as Mauritius. Sustainable peace requires open and inclusive social and political spaces.

Towards a more peaceful continent: an agenda for global and African actors?

Improving the prospect for durable peace in Africa requires shifts in mentality and practice both from African and global actors.

Global actors

48. Global actors need to sincerely listen to African voices and give adequate space for the contestations of ideologies and ideas regarding notions such as the role of the state vis-à-vis the market; the timing of measures targeted at the different component of the peacebuilding' the meaning and contribution of actors such as civil society and approaches to inclusion and economic empowerment. Global actors must also be alerted about the effect of peacebuilding on the political processes and role of history which invariably brings in contextual nuances. They need to give voice to the call for peace based on global justice in various areas ranging from the debate on global warming to fair trade.

African actors

49. African actors need not shy away from locally inspired solutions and must craft collective aspirations and common visions transcending fragmentation and contestation. They need to be committed to an African solution to African problems that adequately address the peace and justice concerns of African society. Leaders need to be committed to mobilise the required resources and give space for other African non-state actors with different agendas, while other African actors need to put pressure on leaders to shift their orientations.

Conclusion

Conflict in Africa and indeed security threats worldwide are rapidly mutating while traditional sources of insecurity continue to confront humanity. Peace will continue to be challenged by technological transformation, demographic shift, climate change, the exercise and lethargy of African agency and emergence of new global actors. Similarly the peacebuilding discourse - what peacebuilding is and how to realise it - has significantly evolved, not always in transformative and progressive ways.

The contradiction between rhetoric and practice, geo-political dynamics and the multiplicity of actors that do not adhere to the same governance regimes, means that the future of peacebuilding is increasingly uncertain. Certainly, how to maintain peace and order - both global and regional - will continue to pre-occupy the international community and African actors alike. However, the question of who will be served by the peace will remain contested. Hence, peacebuilding will remain an arena of politics and contestation where power will play a key role on determining its procedural and substantive contents.

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