EXTERNAL STUDY

AFRICAN PEACEKEEPING AT THE CROSSROADS: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTINENT’S EVOLVING PEACE AND SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

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Executive Summary

This paper addresses three inter-woven issues:

(a) What the actors within the region perceive to be the main security threats that they face;
(b) The nature of the existing regional structures aimed at addressing these threats, and how capable these structures are of meeting the challenge; and
(c) How the United Nations should relate to regional structures in addressing these security concerns, particularly in a context of changing US policy in a post-September 11 world.

The breakdown of authoritarian governance systems at the end of the Cold War has been a source of conflict and mounting insecurity. The massive influx of small arms from Eastern Europe, money laundering, human trafficking and the proliferation of vigilantes, militias and other alternative security forces are some of the security challenges currently facing security institutions on the continent.

African leaders have placed the establishment of the ASF at the heart of the AU’s peace and security agenda with sub-regional organizations such as ECOWAS set to play a key role in its implementation.

In this regard, the UN should focus on strengthening the role of its office in West Africa and creating “backstopping” capacity at the continental and sub-regional levels.
I. INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, security institutions, especially those in Africa, have had to contend with “transformation” on a number of fronts – all different, few unexpected, most mutually reinforcing. At the global level, the end of the Cold War, globalisation and the 11 September 2001 attack on the United States, all brought about the need for multilateral security institutions to make adjustments. At the continental level, the metamorphosis of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU) and the changing nature of security in Africa dictated new ways of assessing threats and addressing security problems. In short, demands from both the global and continental levels have forced multilateral security institutions to adjust to unfolding developments.

This paper sets out to address three inter-woven issues:

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(b) The nature of the existing regional structures aimed at addressing these threats, and how capable these structures are of meeting the challenge;
(c) How the United Nations should relate to regional structures in addressing these security concerns, particularly in a context of changing US policy in a post-11 September world.

II. THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF AFRICA'S SECURITY CHALLENGES

The breakdown of authoritarian governance systems after the Cold War has been a source of conflict and mounting insecurity. The security threats that became apparent at the end of the Cold War had particular dimensions, which emanated from a sense of shared history and experience. In West Africa, for example, the cumulative effect of the breakdown in governance systems under successive military dictatorships and civilian authoritarian regimes created conflict and mounting insecurity, which by the end of the Cold War resulted in relatively peaceful transitions in places like Benin and Mali; armed conflict in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Cote d’Ivoire; and unrest and relative instability in Nigeria.

With the collapse of the bi-polar world other security challenges became apparent, including the following:

(a) Collapse of state institutions, exemplified by developments in countries like Liberia, Somalia, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC);
(b) Increase in communal conflicts, emerging mainly from rising tension in inter-group rivalry and the collapse of old patterns of relationships;
(c) Increasing prominence of conflicts involving the ownership, management and control of natural resources;
(d) Massive influx of small arms and light weapons coming mainly from Eastern Europe initially and now compounded by activities of non-state actors and local manufacture in some cases.
(e) Emergence (and in some cases the re-emergence) of new actors in the politics of conflicts, including mercenaries, warlords, informal militia groups etc;
(f) Increasing prominence of new forms of security threats including money laundering, human trafficking, drugs, cyber-crimes, etc.
Although the conflicts and threats outlined above are context specific, they have peculiar regional dimensions, reinforcing the intrinsic linkage between local, national and regional life in several sub-regions. One manifestation of this is the fluidity of the boundaries between West African states, which makes for relatively rapid spill-over of armed conflict from one state to another, as demonstrated by the movement of refugees, small arms and light weapons, as well as the movement of armed groups and natural resources across borders. Likewise, the socio-economic reality of life in West Africa is such that the presence of active social and ethnic groups across borders creates a network of interests and sentiments that is subsequently difficult to detach from conflict in the region.

Attempts to address these security challenges at several levels in the last decade have produced mixed results which, as indicated below, have at times generated other types of threats. Examples include promoting good governance agendas through elections, institutional reform such as the reform of the security sector and demobilisation programmes. These efforts, motivated in large part by the international community, have produced several trends. One is the increased culture of staging elections. Another is the increase in the number of programmes aimed either at modernisation of the armed forces or reform of the Security Sector.

There is also a regional movement toward harmonizing security policy and standards (see section II below), as well as joint regional training for the military. In particular, there is a renewed effort to improve peacekeeping capacity within Africa with active support from the international community.

Despite these trends and the measure of progress recorded in the collective effort to address security problems at the sub-regional level, several critical gaps remain. The development of normative instruments at the regional and continental levels has not translated into real changes on the ground. The focus of attention is gradually shifting towards the national level, where serious threats to security remain. In a number of countries, elections are perceived as an instrument for legitimizing regimes that are not genuinely committed to reform but meet conditionalities set by International Financial Institutions. However, the space for extensive local participation at all levels of governance has not fully opened up in several parts of Africa and institutions of governance remain weak.

At the national level, alternative security groups continue to proliferate…

The dire security challenges confronting Africans at the country level are reflected in the proliferation of alternative security forces – vigilantes, militia groups, and other private security groups. The continuing presence of these groups is indeed an indication of the state of insecurity and a reflection of the state’s inability to retain a monopoly on the use of force. This remains a security dilemma, particularly for countries that are neither at war nor entirely at peace.

…resulting in armed conflict that sometimes cuts across boundaries, and often necessitates the deployment of peacekeeping operations.

The reality however is that these security challenges have manifested themselves most visibly in armed violence and unrest, which sometimes cuts across national boundaries but often results in internal instability. It is the juxtaposition of internal and external factors that has underlined international reactions to the situation in Africa. However, since many of the indices of political unrest identified above often emerge over an extended period of time, the ones that have attracted immediate external interest and concerns are those that have threatened the institutions of governance and have resulted

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1 From one seemingly democratic regime in 1990 (The Gambia), with much of West Africa under civilian authoritarian or military rule, elections have now become a common feature of politics in West Africa. A number of West African states have now undergone successive changes in government.
in the collapse or near collapse of state structures. It is these that have necessitated the deployment of international peacekeeping missions.

This has in part informed the decision of the international community to focus its attention on strategies for managing the escalation of such violence and creating the capacity to do so within the African continent. Developments within the African Union and the experiences of regional organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have provided a rare opportunity to harness efforts to develop this capacity. African countries have taken part in UN peacekeeping missions, further increasing the capability of African troops to participate in peacekeeping operations. For example, of the 54 UN Peacekeeping missions that have taken place since 1948, African states have participated in 44. The key challenge has been how to harness the skills and experience gained into a collective capacity to effectively manage peace operations within the region.

III. EVOLVING AFRICAN CAPACITY TO ADDRESS REGIONAL SECURITY THREATS

African Union/NEPAD framework

The period since 2000 has witnessed a renewed resolve by African leaders to effectively address conflicts in the region. Several structures and programmes have evolved at the sub-regional and at the continental levels, designed to respond to a range of security threats. The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) was launched in Lusaka, Zambia in July 2001 and subsequently endorsed by African Leaders at the establishment of the African Union (AU) in Durban in July 2002. Underpinning the pledge of African leaders is the assumption that sustainable development cannot be achieved in the absence of peace, security, democracy, good governance, human rights and sound economic management. While the ideas proposed in NEPAD are not entirely new, this initiative signified a renewed commitment by African leaders to find effective and efficient ways to address the region’s security and development crises.

NEPAD identified three major preconditions for the sustainable development of the African continent namely: peace and security; democracy and political governance; and economic and corporate governance. The NEPAD peace and security agenda also sought to strengthen existing conflict prevention mechanisms and sub-regional institutions and thus placed emphasis on four key areas namely:

a. Prevention, management and resolution of conflict;
b. Peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace enforcement;
c. Post conflict reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction;
d. Combating the illicit proliferation of small arms, light weapons and landmines.

While the NEPAD agenda was enthusiastically received by the international community, several issues created considerable difficulty for its implementation. First was the relationship between NEPAD and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which later became the AU. NEPAD not only coincided with efforts to transform the OAU into the AU, it was created outside the existing OAU framework. Consequently, there was a need to clarify organizational relationships between existing peace and security structures and initiatives in order to avoid duplication of efforts. These structures

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2 Several initiatives aimed at addressing Africa’s development problems include preceded NEPAD. They include, for example, the Lagos Plan of Action, the African Alternative Framework for Structural Adjustment and the Conference on Stability, Security Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA).

3 NEPAD framework document, point 74, page 16.
included, for example, the Central Organ of the OAU and the Conference on Stability, Security, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA), which was adopted by OAU leaders in 1999.

Following a review of the structures, procedures and working methods of the Central Organ in March 2002, its name was changed to “Peace and Security Council” (PSC). The meeting in which the review of the Central Organ was conducted also examined the relationship between NEPAD, CSSDCA and the AU. NEPAD and the CSSDCA have subsequently been integrated as programmes of the African Union.

However, there is now greater clarity on the AU’s role in advancing the continent’s security agenda. Clarification of the AU-NEPAD relationship has placed the peace and security role of the AU in proper perspective. In accordance with its stated objective of promoting “peace, security, and stability on the continent” (article 3f of the Constitutive Act of the AU), African leaders committed themselves to the establishment of a common defence policy for the African Continent (article 4d) and the “peaceful resolution of conflicts among Member States of the Union” (article 4e). The AU will “coordinate and harmonize policies between existing and future Regional Economic Communities for the gradual attainment of [these and other] objectives of the Union” (article 3I).

The Constitutive Act of the AU also established the organs of the Union. The Peace and Security Council, which was not initially included in the Constitutive Act but created following a review of the OAU Central Organ, is the organ responsible for implementing the peace and security agenda of the Union. Specifically, it is the duty of the Council to anticipate and prevent conflicts; authorise the mounting and deployment of Peace Support Missions; and implement the common defence and security policy of the AU. In its membership, the Council has fifteen elected members, ten of whom will serve a term of two years whilst five will serve a term of three, and it meets at the Permanent Representatives, Ministers and Heads of State and Government levels.

Among the structures to support the PSC are a Panel of the Wise; Early Warning System, Stand-by force, Military Staff Committee and a Special Fund. At the heart of this peace and security agenda is the objective of a permanent African armed force, an idea that long predates the AU. The idea of developing a Common Defence and Security Policy for Africa is geared, in part, towards attaining this objective. The initial conceptualization of a common Defence and Security Policy for Africa led to several proposals, including the following:

- Establishment of an AU Stand-by Force to enhance African peacekeeping capacity, with a common peacekeeping doctrine. To make the force relevant to the Union’s needs, the strength and type of the contingents of the force will be determined by AU Peace support Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). It will also report directly to the PSC. The force’s main tasks will include: intervention in member states in respect of grave circumstances; response to demands from member states to restore peace and security; preventive deployment to prevent conflicts from escalating or an on-going conflict from spreading to neighbouring areas;

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4 See Report of Brainstorming Session for the Ambassadors of the Central Organ and the NEPAD Implementation Committee in George, South Africa, 18-22 March 2002.
5 The following organs were established under article 5 of the Constitutive act of the AU: The Assembly of the Union; The Executive Council; The Pan-African Parliament; The Court of Justice; The Commission; The Permanent Representatives Committee; The Specialized Technical Committees; The Economic, Social and Cultural Council; The Financial Institutions;
The origins of the African Standby Force date back to Kwame Nkrumah’s call for an African High Command.

There is now an unprecedented degree of cooperation between the AU and REC’s.

The AU appears determined to take a more proactive stance on regional security issues.

For example, the AU is seeking to improve its recruitment methods.

…and is strengthening its links with Civil society.

Ironically, some developments that, on the surface, may appear new are, in reality, not that new at all. One example is the African Stand-by Force (ASF), whose origins date back to the establishment of the OAU and the call by late President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana for an African High Command. There are, nevertheless, aspects of the recent decision on the stand-by-force that are altogether different from the Nkrumah proposal. For example, while the Nkrumah agenda never went beyond the proposal stage, there are now concrete efforts to implement the ASF initiative. Moreover, while Nkrumah’s proposal was largely geared towards counterbalancing external forces that might wish to exploit Africa, the recent stand-by-force initiative is being implemented with the help of the very same forces. This, in a way, indicates the impact of changing times on Africa’s security architecture.

The AU appears more determined to take a proactive stance on peace and security issues on the continent. While it would be wrong to suggest that the OAU did not consider such issues important, the AU has clearly taken a wider interest than its predecessor. This can be seen in the reconstitution of the fabric of structures designed to address crucial security issues. Furthermore, African leaders are more willing to discuss issues that were once considered antithetical to continental stability, such as the contentious issue of “non-interference” in the internal affairs of member states.

There is more openness in the way the AU’s officers are appointed. Although this is still evolving, there is an increasing perception of fairness in the whole process and this has won the organisation a measure of respectability in the eyes of many of its critics. More importantly however, its new approach to recruitment will ensure that more qualified people are brought into key positions in the Secretariat, while not completely doing away with experienced staff that can ensure institutional memory and continuity.

Furthermore, the AU is strengthening its links with African civil society organisations. This is a reversal of tides that was unthinkable several decades ago. In the past few years, the AU has held several consultative meetings with civil society organisations across the continent and is developing joint initiatives on crucial issues like peace and
security, election monitoring, and gender issues. This may herald a new era of greater grass roots participation in continental governance.

An often unacknowledged change that has occurred in the AU is the greater participation of North African countries in the activities of the organisation. For a long time, sub-Saharan African affairs dominated the AU’s agenda, with the North attracting peripheral attention. This is not surprising given the numerical superiority of sub-Saharan African countries vis-à-vis the North and the fact that, in its early years, the AU’s agenda was dominated by issues such as decolonisation and the fight against apartheid and minority rule. North Africa is now the focus of attention, thanks, in great part, to the role Libyan leader, Moammar Ghadafi, has played in the transition from the OAU to the AU and the efforts of the Algerian President, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, in the formation of NEPAD.

The Challenge of Implementation

Implementation of the AU’s security agenda is a long-term challenge. While the peace and security agenda set out in the overall AU framework including the NEPAD programme reflects the collective aspiration of Africans, the AU leadership is keenly aware that these objectives cannot be realized in the short term. A number of potential challenges must be addressed in the short to medium-term.

First, it is envisaged that the ASF will respond to diverse operational environments varying from situations requiring preventive deployment to enforcement operations. Therefore, an African Stand-by Force will require careful strategic planning and incremental build up from national to sub-regional levels.

First, the ASF will need to be built up incrementally from the national sub-regional levels.

Second, the development of a common doctrine will be particularly challenging. Much will depend on the nature of the operational environment and development of a common concept of operations, at least at sub-regional levels. This is compounded by the fact that the operational environment in which the ASF will operate is not stagnant. As more civil wars are resolved, the nature of the threat emerging from the national level will change, possibly resulting in a return to a murkier operational environment dominated by low-intensity conflicts generated by intra and inter-communal conflicts.

The development of a common doctrine will be a major challenge.

As part of the effort to overcome some of these challenges, it may be more rewarding to create a division of labour, in various aspects of peace support operations, particularly among Member States with a tradition of contributing to peace missions. This might provide a first level of preparation toward the creation of a Stand-by Force. Experiences acquired from participation in African peace operations have shown (even if informally) that certain countries have particular skills in specific aspects of peace support operations. For example, it is assumed that the Nigerian and Guinean armed forces are more effective as a crack force for peace enforcement while the Ghanaian army is believed to be more experienced in traditional peacekeeping.

The creation of a division of labour among member states with a peacekeeping tradition may help overcome some of these challenges.

Specialization and training should cover activities along a spectrum – from peacekeeping to reconstruction, including preventive deployment, peacekeeping, enforcement operations, disarming of armed groups, training of military and police personnel and assistance toward overall institutional reform and provision of logistical support through these phases. Training should also be targeted at Member States that not only have the capacity to contribute troops to peace operations, but that have a track record of contributing to peace operations and can make them available when the need arises.

Training should be targeted at Member States who have a track record of contributing to peace operations.

Sub-regional organisations will play a central role in developing African peacekeeping capacities.

The Capacity Challenge

Sub-regional organizations will play a central role in the effort to develop an African peacekeeping capacity to be managed by the AU. In realization of the potential that
Institutional mechanisms at the sub-regional level offer for addressing Africa’s peace and security challenges, sub-regional organizations and RECs such as ECOWAS and SADC have been assigned the function of coordinating the NEPAD agenda in their respective sub-regions. Much benefit can be derived from strengthening the capacity of these institutions to develop a mutually supportive relationship with one another as well as the AU.

A key strategy of the AU is to use the RECs as building blocks for the implementation of its key programmes. The approach to developing the ASF by building brigade size forces in each sub-region is a reflection of this. Of all the RECs, ECOWAS appears to be the most advanced in mounting peacekeeping operations and perhaps the only REC able to mobilise 3,000 or more troops. ECOWAS is also uniquely placed to offer experience and expertise, its obvious limitations notwithstanding. It has developed both the normative framework and an implementation plan – as demonstrated by the adoption of its Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security in December 1999 and subsequent restructuring of its Secretariat from 2000 (see Annex 6).

If indeed ECOWAS’ declarations of intent are translated into substance, it is possible for the peace and security objectives of the AU, including those outlined in NEPAD, to take a much firmer root in West Africa in the not too distant future. It is in part in recognition of this fact that the AU has used the ECOWAS framework as the standard for other RECs to attain in order to effectively implement the AU/NEPAD agenda.

In assessing African capacity to initiate and manage peace support operations, including the creation of a Stand-by Force, consideration should be given to the reality of the existing situation on the continent. Capacity to provide 3,000 troops in each of the five regions is uneven as is the experience in responding to crisis. While West Africa, the region with the greatest experience in mounting peacekeeping operations, may find this relatively easy, other regions are likely to find this requirement somewhat daunting.

A closer look at the track record of some countries with a history in peacekeeping provides an indication of existing and future capabilities. For example, Nigeria, Ghana and Guinea have regularly contributed battalion sized contingents to peacekeeping operations. Since 1990, Nigeria, Ghana and Guinea have contributed battalion sized contingents to peacekeeping operations. For example, Nigeria, Ghana and Guinea have regularly contributed battalion sized contingents to peacekeeping operations.

In East and Central Africa, Tanzania and Uganda contributed battalion sized contingents to ECOMOG in 1993-94 of about 800 troops each. Uganda’s capacity to make a contribution to peace support operations in a sustained manner may have decreased as a result of its internal (northern Uganda) and external (DRC) security challenges. Kenya has also made modest contributions to peacekeeping and might be able to develop a pattern of regular contribution via the ASF.

6 Figure obtained from the Centre for Democracy and Development’s paper on the establishment of a NEPAD Strategy and Implementation Program for West Africa.
Rwanda has demonstrated increasing willingness to participate in peace operations having contributed the first 150 troops (alongside Nigeria, which is expected to deploy an additional 150 troops by the end of August 2004) to a force deployed by the AU to protect the ceasefire monitors in the Darfur region in the Sudan. There is no indication that more contributions will come from Central Africa in the foreseeable future given that the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the largest country in that region, has occupied the attention of neighbouring Rwanda and Uganda.

In Southern Africa, where there is an apparent capacity to contribute to peacemaking in the region, the political stalemate over the management of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security presents a major challenge. There is also a lack of coherence within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) given the apparent division between states favouring interventionist principles (Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia) as demonstrated by their intervention in the DRC) and those who favour diplomacy, namely South Africa and Botswana. However, if the idea is to achieve specialisation and a division of labour among troop-contributing countries, it is conceivable that countries like South Africa and Botswana would specialise in preventive deployment and policing (i.e. traditional peacekeeping functions) while Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe would focus on peace missions with more robust mandates.

In North Africa, the potential for contribution exists particularly if the present momentum is maintained. It might therefore be possible for the Maghreb Union to play a role.

A phased approach in which attention is concentrated in the first instance on countries with a track-record of contributing to peace operations may be required in order to move steadily toward the eventual target. While there is obvious merit in a position that favours the inclusion of newcomers, the reality on the ground is that the threat of armed conflict remains and the AU will need to respond to such situations as it continues to build the ASF. The Darfur crisis aptly illustrates this challenge. The AU will need to rely on Member States with some experience of responding to such crises and a willingness to deploy their troops immediately. The training and inclusion of newcomers can occur as a next step.

However, focusing on countries with a track-record and previous peacekeeping experience means that some countries might commit troops in the absence of a corresponding capacity within the sub-regional organization. This is likely to be the case in East and Central Africa, where the RECs have limited experience of staging peace operations. A two-pronged approach might be pursued in which countries from these regions make contributions to peace operations under the auspices of the AU or another REC while the capacity of their RECs is simultaneously developed.

The level of progress towards the establishment of Stand-by Forces in each of the five regions reflects this unevenness in capacity among RECs. To date, ECOWAS is the only REC to have made steady progress in this area. Its Defence Commission agreed on a Stand-by Force of 6,500 troops, with capacity to deploy 1,500 troops within 30 days. The key challenge in West Africa, however, is how to achieve interoperability between the Anglophone and Francophone countries.

Perhaps the greatest capacity challenge confronting African organizations is that of building a sound knowledge base, including the development of a cadre of African logisticians, to be based within AU and RECs headquarters. In this regard, the lack of backstopping capacity within these headquarters remains a serious gap. Addressing this gap will require a measure of creativity and a change of approach, which might include among other things, developing a system of skills transfer by seconding UN headquarters staff to the AU Secretariat over a sustained period.
The division of labour among the RECs will be uneven at the start given their unequal capacity. It is conceivable that ECOWAS will provide about half of the required five brigades in the foreseeable future, thus providing the heavy-lifting required for peace support operations while the other RECs gradually build up the required capacity. During this period, ECOWAS might be expected to manage peace operations with more robust mandates while other regions might focus on provision of support components such as engineering units and field hospitals.

**IV. THE ROLE OF THE UN AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

Since September 2001, the UN and other multilateral as well as bilateral actors have had to respond to Africa’s security needs (as in other places) in a changed policy environment heavily influenced by the counter-terrorism agenda. This has impacted the African agenda in several ways. While there appears to be greater donor interest in the African peace and security agenda, this agenda has been influenced to a certain extent by a growing anti-terrorism drive from outside the region. External (particularly US) interest in this agenda is based on the fear that Africa could be used as a staging post for future terrorist activities. In Africa, this influence is reflected in the language of post-September 11 official programmes and documents of regional organizations and in some training programmes.

As a result of this drive, there is also a growing tendency to place more emphasis on “hard” security issues such as the roles and training of military forces, at the expense of the “soft” security issues that would ultimately reduce the need for military interventions or the more robust peace operations conducted, for example, by ECOMOG in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Perhaps even more significantly, the external interest in Security Sector rebuilding in Africa is moving toward training for intelligence and information sharing rather than governance and democratic control. Issues such as governance rebuilding, including Security Sector Reform based on a peacebuilding approach and youth demobilization and training programmes are likely to receive less attention if this trend continues. Furthermore, there is some indication that with the increased commitments of the US, UK and the rest of the Coalition to developments in Iraq, the limited African capacity being developed for peacekeeping on the continent will be diverted towards filling gaps in operations elsewhere.7

As a minimum, it is therefore critical that Africans are able to determine their own agendas and their priorities after which they should steer external actors towards areas where their assistance and input would be most relevant. Failure to do this might result in revisions of the peace and security agenda that has evolved over the last decade. External actors have a natural tendency to give priority to their own interests. Where these interests do not coincide with the African agenda, the latter will invariably fall prey to the former.

Like the regional organizations, the UN agenda is often influenced by the interests of the permanent members of the UN Security Council and as such, there is a limit to what the UN can do, particularly in areas where the permanent members have a high level of interest. Nonetheless, the UN has been active in the effort to advance the African agenda and to develop the capacity of regional organizations. In West Africa, for example, a UN inter-agency mission to the sub-region in 2001 and several follow-up activities by an inter-agency Task Force on West Africa led to the creation of the UN

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Office in West Africa. It was envisaged that this UN Office, to which major UN agencies and departments would second their staff and coordinate their activities, would bring the UN political presence closer to West Africans, and provide support to the work of ECOWAS on the ground.

Nearly two years after the creation of this office, which is located in Dakar, Senegal, its practical relevance is yet to be felt by West Africans, particularly in the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja. Although the UN office suffered initial logistical and other problems before becoming fully operational, many of the gaps in its relationship with ECOWAS can be attributed to other factors, including, for example, the location of the office, communication difficulties with the ECOWAS Secretariat, and the natural tendency to gravitate towards other UN structures and initiatives. As a result, ECOWAS is yet to reap any significant benefits from the UN political presence in West Africa.

In addition to the work traditionally undertaken by agencies such as UNDP and UNICEF, the UN’s involvement in Africa is more visible in the field of peacekeeping and peace support operations. It is in this area that the UN has been able to reassert itself, thus regaining some credibility in recent years, with the UN Mission in Sierra Leone following ECOMOG’s departure from the scene in April 2000 and subsequently, the UN Mission in Liberia. However, care should be taken to avoid creating an impression of competition with African regional organisations.

In this regard, African regional organisations have much to learn from UN peacekeeping and can best do so by taking responsibility for peace missions with support from the UN.

Despite the long history of African involvement in peacekeeping operations and more recently regional peace support operations, there are still serious gaps in the capacity of African military personnel to undertake effective operations. Africa has much to learn from UN Peacekeeping, which is also constantly evolving. However, this lesson can best be learnt if African organisations begin to take primary responsibility for peace missions with sustained support from the UN. This calls for new thinking and innovative approaches to collaboration between the UN and African regional organisations, coordinated from the AU down to the sub-regions.

Support received from other parts of the international community has contributed immensely to the momentum generated within the AU in the past two years, particularly in the area of peace support operations. An important development is the European Union (EU) funded African Peace Facility, which provides for 250 million Euros to finance peacekeeping operations in Africa. It aims to give ownership to Africans in the initiation and management of peacekeeping operations. It is envisaged that peace operations in Africa will be led, operated and staffed by Africans. This approach is at the core of developing capacity for the management of peace missions in Africa. This implies, however, that operations such as Artemis, which was mounted by the EU in response to the situation in Ituri, would be given only secondary consideration.

V. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are aimed at a cross-section of actors engaged in the process of implementing the African peace and security agenda at both the sub-regional and regional levels:

- Stand-by arrangements should begin from the sub-regional level and follow a division of labour across the sub-regions, such that stand-by units, in-country, focus on specific areas of activity across the spectrum of peace support operations, including policing, enforcement operations, logistical support etc. Greater emphasis should be placed initially on creating stand-by units in countries that regularly contribute troops to peace support operations.
Priority should be given to building “backstopping” capacity at the continental and sub-regional levels.

The AU Secretariat should be staffed with qualified African logistical and other support staff.

The AU and key REC’s should work closely with regional peacekeeping training centres.

The UN and ECOWAS should seek to reinforce the role of the UN office in West Africa.

A strategic framework should be developed to address African security needs.

- Development of peacekeeping capacity from the regional to continental levels should give priority to the creation of “backstopping” capacity within the Secretariats of the main sub-regional organisations and at the level of the AU. In this regard, the UN should consider seconding staff to the AU and REC Secretariats over a sustained period to work with and impart knowledge to newly recruited staff on best practices in the deployment and management of peace operations. The current support being offered to the AU by the UN, through the despatch of personnel to assist with developing a concept of operations for the proposed operation in Darfur is a good starting point. Such arrangements should be rendered systematic in order to develop capacity within the AU Secretariat.

- The development of capacity within the AU and REC’s will be greatly assisted by the recruitment of suitably qualified Africans and targeted training for a cadre of Africans to be based in the AU Secretariat. The recruitment and training of logisticians and other support staff will be particularly useful in this regard.

- The AU and key sub-regional organizations should develop systematic collaboration with regional peacekeeping training centres as well as with critical civil society actors whose expertise can provide support for the Union’s peace and security agenda.

- The UN and ECOWAS should pursue a strategy to ensure that the UN Office in West Africa is actively engaged with the ECOWAS Secretariat. This might entail among other things, the secondment of staff on a rotational basis to the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja.

- These activities should be undertaken within a strategic framework that takes into consideration the full peace and security agenda of the African continent, thus addressing other potential security threats, which require efforts beyond peacekeeping.