

A Pan-African army: The evolution of an idea and its eventual realisation in the African Standby Force

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The idea of establishing a permanent Pan-African army has for long caught the imagination of Africans as a potential solution to many of their continent's manifold security problems. This feature tracks the quest for a Pan-African military force through the past five decades covering the feeble attempts of Africa's freedom fighters to join forces, the repeated failure to establish an African High Command (AHC) in the early years of decolonisation, the subsequent inability of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Defence Commission to agree on a common defence structure, and the various fruitless initiatives of the international community to set up a Pan-African peacekeeping force in the 1990s. On the basis of this retrospective journey, the article argues that the African Union's current initiative to establish an African Standby Force (ASF) based on five regionally administered standby brigades should be seen in the tradition of this long quest and not as a groundbreaking new conceptual development, as argued by some. It further contends that even though the ASF is conceptually closer to the Standby Arrangement of the United Nations (UNSAS) than to a Pan-African army as envisioned by leading Pan-Africanists such as Kwame Nkrumah, it nonetheless marks a substantial development in Africa's continental self-emancipation which should be greeted and supported by Africans and the international community alike.

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Introduction

Much has been written on the African Standby Force (ASF) in this and other publications ever since the July 2002 Durban Summit endorsed its establishment as one of the cornerstones of a new African security edifice. Little, however, is generally known about the many attempts at establishing some sort of Pan-African military force which preceded the creation of the ASF and which had a profound impact on the way in which the AU's current security architecture has evolved. This paper aims to shed some light on this long quest for a Pan-African force, emphasising the rationale(s) offered for centralising the responsibility for the security of the African continent as well as the many obstacles thereto. It is divided into three parts: The first part introduces the reader to the various (failed) initiatives that set the stage for the establishment of the ASF. The second part tracks the conceptual evolution of the latter from the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution agreed upon during the 1993 Cairo Summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to its present form. The final part discusses the current stage of development and shortly elaborates on the remaining challenges. The feature concludes by arguing that the African Union (AU) should be credited for realising a worthy military concept, not failing to caution that not all of the political tensions underlying inter-African security cooperation which had crippled the ASF's conceptual predecessors have yet been convincingly resolved.

The origin of the idea (1922–1958)

With the plans of several colonial powers to establish large African armies limited by their respective geographical control, the idea of a Pan-African military force seems to have grown out of communist revolutionary propaganda. As early as 1922 an article in the *Communist Review* demanded that “no opportunity should be lost for propagandizing the native soldiers in the colonial armies and for organizing secretly a great Pan-African army in the same way as the Sinn Fein built up the Irish Army under the very nose of England”.¹ Over the years, as the struggle for liberation from colonial rule intensified, so did the calls for uniting the military resources of Africa in order to achieve the continent's independence.

The topic was frequently discussed at Pan-African conferences across the world but did not receive serious political support until Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, voiced the idea of an African High Command (AHC) and the establishment of an African legion during the All-African People's Conference in 1958. According to him, the objectives of such a military construct were threefold, namely to defend the increasing number of independent African states from imperialist aggression, to offer African states a feasible alternative to disadvantageous military pacts with the Cold War powers, and to spearhead the liberation of areas under colonial and white supremacist control.

The quest for an 'African High Command' (1958–1963)

Despite its popular appeal, Nkrumah's radical proposal encountered passionate opposition from the growing number of nationalists among Africa's leading politicians who saw the centralisation of military power as a first (and irreversible) step towards the political unification of the continent. While this was exactly what several politicians such as Nkrumah himself had hoped and worked for, many other African leaders believed in a more gradual approach to continental unity that would not infringe upon the newly won sovereignty of their states. This irreconcilable difference in perspectives eventually combined with divergent views on ongoing developments such as the international intervention in the Congo crisis and the war in Algeria to polarise Africa's states into opposing groups.

The so-called Casablanca group consisted of countries who proposed the immediate creation of a political union for Africa in which economic, cultural and military activities would be coordinated centrally. The states in the rival Brazzaville group (later to be called the Monrovia group) considered themselves more conservative and gradualist.² Instead of a close organic identification within some form of constitutional Union of Africa, they advocated a unity that was not "political integration of sovereign states, but unity of aspirations and of action".³

Given this divergence in objectives, it is hardly surprising that the two groups attempted to institutionalise two very different conceptions of military cooperation and integration. While the Brazzaville states opted for a simple Joint Defence Command (with a purely advisory role) to be based in Ougoudougou, the capital of Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), the Casablanca states were far more ambitious. Article 2 of the January 1961 African Charter of Casablanca not only created a Joint African High Command as one of four specialised committees, but also charged it with the setting up of a viable unified military structure capable of freeing all African territories that were still under foreign rule.

For several reasons, among them most states' increasing preoccupation with domestic issues, neither group's concept was realised before a general *rapprochement* culminated in the 1963 establishment of the OAU (and the groups' subsequent dissolution). Far from marking the end of his quest for an AHC, this re-organisation of Africa's institutional landscape tempted Nkrumah to renew his calls for the establishment of a unified military structure "to ensure the stability and security of Africa".⁴

However, despite his passionate plea Nkrumah failed to get the idea entrenched in the OAU Charter and a far less authoritative Defence Commission was created in its stead as one of the organisation's five specialised commissions.

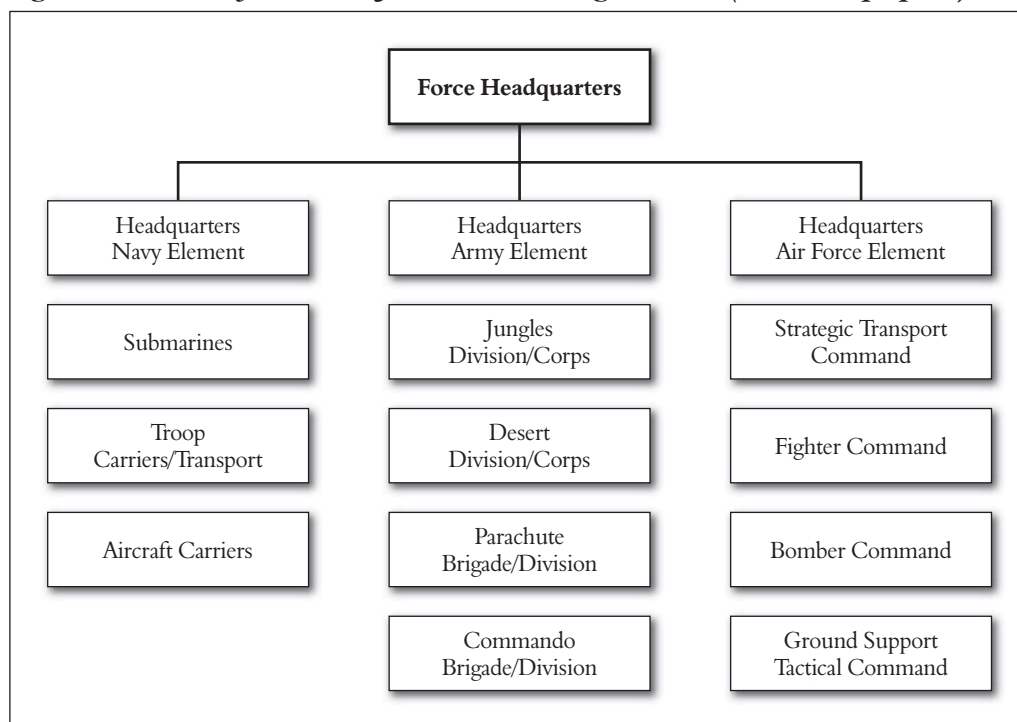
The OAU Defence Commission

The central purpose of the Defence Commission was to work out a formula for coordinating and harmonising the defence policies of member states to enable the OAU to execute the defence role it assumed under Article 11 of its charter. Even though the proposal for an AHC had been rejected by the majority of founding members as premature, the idea was repeatedly re-introduced to the meetings of the commission and discussed under ever new names such as African Defence Organisation, African Defence Force, or African Peace Force.⁵ However, no matter how often or under what name and parameters the idea was discussed, the increasingly entrenched concepts of territoriality and sovereignty that had already plagued continental politics before the inception of the OAU continued to prevent the establishment of a supranational military organisation.

Nonetheless, the issue never quite disappeared. Instances of insecurity such as mutinies (for instance Tanzania in 1964), mercenary raids (such as the seizure of Kisangani in 1967) as well as attacks by colonial powers and white supremacist regimes (for example the Portuguese invasion of Guinea in 1970) occasionally reminded Africa's states of their own vulnerability and generally led to renewed discussions on the need to join forces. In that way, the quest for some kind of Pan-African military force as possible organ for the preservation of Africa's territorial integrity and spearhead for the continent's liberation served as constant background music to inter-African relations, until the end of the Cold War changed many of the underlying dynamics. The following examples present some of the evolutionary concepts and milestones on the long and winding road to the ASF during that period.

The 1963 Ghanaian proposal (a Union High Command)

During the Defence Commission's first meeting in Accra in late 1963, the Ghanaian delegation presented yet another elaborate proposal for a unified military structure, including the strategic siting or re-siting of military bases throughout Africa and the drawing up of actual plans for the immediate liberation of the dependent territories of Africa.⁶ The proposal provided for the establishment of a military organisation controlled by one military authority and a Supreme Command Headquarters to be responsible to the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. Besides the setting up of a Union Joint Services Supreme Military Command Headquarters, the plan also included four Joint Services Regional Headquarters to be responsible for the defence of the four 'free' regions of Africa (North, East, Central and West) and an extremely ambitious Union Joint Services Strategic Reserve Command which (very much like today's conceptual ASF) would be in a state of readiness to counter any military threat that might arise anywhere in Africa (see Figure 1). In addition to a union army, union navy and union air force, there would also be a union strike force and even a union military intelligence organisation, union military research and development organisation and union military planning organisation.⁷

Figure 1: Structure of the Union Joint Service Strategic Reserve (Ghanaian proposal)

This proposal was strongly opposed by the Nigerian delegation, which raised three main objections to it: that it involved a substantial loss of sovereignty; that the cost of having such a military structure was prohibitive, and that it would inevitably be bedevilled by other problems such as manpower, equipment and weapon standardisation, problems of logistics, unified training, deployment of troops, and the appointment of the Supreme Commander.⁸ To underline its argument, the Nigerian delegation repeatedly alluded to the failure of the Casablanca group's Joint African High Command to achieve any practical results as an indication of the difficulties.⁹

The majority of delegations subsequently voted against the Ghanaian proposal and instead recommended the establishment of an insignificantly staffed permanent military headquarters within the OAU secretariat.

The 1965 Sierra Leonean proposal (an African Defence Organisation)

At the second meeting of the Defence Commission in Freetown in February 1965, the delegation from Sierra Leone submitted a somewhat more moderate proposal calling for the establishment of an African Defence Organisation (ADO). Instead of advocating a permanent standing army as Nkrumah and his Ghanaians had done, the Sierra Leonean delegates suggested a continental clearinghouse for national armed forces (which would

later serve as a model for the ASF Regional Headquarters) supported by a committee of military experts. Under this clearinghouse, each OAU member state would have been asked to earmark one or more units of its armed forces to be placed at the disposal of the OAU for specific operations. These forces would have remained stationed in their own countries and would have been mobilised and used under the aegis of the OAU only at the express request of one or more member states attacked from outside Africa, or suffering from serious internal trouble, or in conflict with other OAU member states.¹⁰

Despite its more moderate character, the Sierra Leonean proposal was opposed by the majority of delegations. While the Nigerian delegations saw it as “yet another clever manoeuvre to skip in the concept of an AHC by the back door”,¹¹ many other delegations expressed concerns about capabilities, financing and security implications as well as the possible role of ADO forces in maintaining oppressive and unpopular governments in power. Following this fruitless discussion, the Defence Commission was not revived until December 1970 in Addis Ababa in order to examine the growing threat posed by Portugal and the white supremacist regimes in South Africa and Rhodesia.

The 1970 Nigerian-Ghanaian turnaround and the rise of a regionalised defence structure

In an ironic reversal of positions, the Nigerians finally came to embrace the idea of an AHC when their civil war ended in January 1970, while the Ghanaians, having expelled the leading advocate of the idea, President Kwame Nkrumah, seemed less and less enthusiastic. However, even with the strong support of the Nigerians and continental attention redrawn to the need for common action by the OAU’s inability to respond to the Portuguese invasion of Guinea in November 1970, the Defence Commission rejected the formation of a centralised High Command and in its stead recommended the creation of regional defence units. Based on the original division of the continent into four zones proposed by Nkrumah nearly a decade earlier, these units were supposed to consist of national armed forces which could be placed at the disposal of the OAU for specific operations. An executive secretariat for defence composed of one regional chief of staff and his deputy, as well as representatives from the various national armed forces, was to coordinate the regional units.¹² Just like the previous plans, this one was not implemented, once again confirming OAU Secretary-General Diallo Telli’s lamentation that “nowhere is the sense of urgency so lacking in the majority of member states as towards the idea of an African High Command whose creation is the outstanding task of the Defence Commission”.¹³

The 1978–1980 discussion (an OAU Defence Force)

The call for a Pan-African force which had flared up occasionally since the debate in the early 1970s (especially during the height of the civil war in Angola in 1975) became

particularly loud again during the Council of Ministers' 31st ordinary session in Khartoum in July 1978. By then, events such as the increasingly frequent attacks by South Africa and Rhodesia on the frontline states or the Zaire government's use of transport provided by non-African powers (notably Belgium) to deploy troops from Morocco and other African countries within its borders had driven even Tanzania's previously sceptical President Julius Nyerere to declare that "it might be a good thing if the OAU was sufficiently united to establish an African High Command and a Pan-African Security Force".¹⁴ Following a heated debate, the Council called for the reactivation of the OAU Defence Commission to consider "the desirability of establishing an inter-African military force under the aegis of the OAU".¹⁵ In April 1979, the sixth ordinary session of the Defence Commission agreed that it was both desirable and necessary that the OAU should finally set up an OAU Defence Force whose role was to be fourfold, namely to support member states in the event of an aggression from non-African powers; to assist liberation movements in their struggles; to provide peacekeeping and observer forces in the event of conflict between member states; and to cooperate with the UN in matters of defence and security affecting member states.

Even though the chances for the establishment of a Pan-African military force thus seemed better than ever before, the OAU Summit held in Sierra Leone in July 1980 avoided a decision on the Defence Commission's proposal and simply referred the OAU Defence Force scheme back for further study.¹⁶ Once again, as soon as the states' shock over their vulnerability and thus the felt need for action had receded, so had their enthusiasm for tackling all the political obstacles and severe practical, structural, institutional, technical, logistical, financial and operational difficulties associated with the creation of a Pan-African force.

While it is certainly true that various leaders' personal conceptions of African unity played an important role in the repeated attempts to establish a Pan-African military force, the security situation on the continent at any one time was the all-important determinant. Every serious discussion on such a force since 1965 had been triggered by an incident of insecurity (and had eventually ebbed away again with the memory of that incident and its particular imminence). Without such an accompanying unifying threat to overcome the enormous introversion of African states, a proposal for military cooperation or even integration did not stand a chance against the continent's many vested interests.¹⁷

The OAU Peacekeeping Operation in Chad (1981–1982)

Beginning with the initiation of a mediatory process in 1977, the OAU's involvement in the decade-long civil war in Chad eventually culminated in the organisation's unprecedented military intervention in December 1981. For the first time ever, an African force was mandated by an African organisation to conduct peacekeeping operations within one of its member states and many saw this as a first step towards

the eventual institutionalisation of continental military cooperation. However, the OAU force soon encountered immense difficulties and was hastily withdrawn in June 1982.

The many problems that beset the OAU peacekeeping force in Chad – reaching from logistical and financial shortages to an unclear mandate and a lack of interoperability – were a practical demonstration of all that the opponents of the Pan-African high command or any other form of Pan-African military force had been saying all along.¹⁸ Not surprisingly, the operation's unmitigated failure had a great impact on the continental willingness to contemplate further Pan-African security initiatives. Instead, the subsequent institutional frustration and regional disillusion led to a devolution of such initiatives.

Devolution and the emergence of regional security initiatives

The devolution was a historically and politically logical process resulting from the OAU's cautious approach which prevented it from establishing the mechanisms and framework necessary to tackle the security problems of the continent.¹⁹ Regional initiatives such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) or the Front Line States' Inter-State Defence and Security Committee (ISDSC) eventually filled the void that had been created by the OAU's inability to set up an integrated defence mechanism.

Established in November 1976 to advance regional economic cooperation and integration, ECOWAS, for example, implemented a number of security protocols in the early 1980s that would lay the basis for the organisation's Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to successfully intervene in the Liberian civil war in August 1990. Named Operation Liberty, this intervention received widespread praise as "the first real attempt by African countries to (re)solve an African conflict" and OAU Secretary-General Dr Salim A Salim anticipated that the experience would make Africans realise the need for the establishment of an African High Command as well as military cooperation.²⁰

As the section below will show, Dr Salim was right in more than one way. The intervention in Liberia did not only set a remarkable precedent and reinforced the trend towards regionalised military cooperation, but it also increased the international community's attention to and support for the concept of "African solutions to African problems".²¹ It thereby set the stage for the proliferation of African security initiatives in the 1990s and thus eventually also for the creation of the ASF.

The basis for a Pan-African force (1990–2000)

After more than three decades of futile attempts to establish a Pan-African military force, the tide had slowly begun to turn in the early 1990s. With the Cold War's shackles

gone, the continent exploded in violent conflicts which, directly or indirectly, led to four important developments on the road to the ASF, namely the OAU's decision to establish an Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution; the international community's growing substitution of support to African security initiatives for its own direct involvement in the continent's troubles; the increasing acceptance of regional organisations as possible pillars for and implementation agencies of a continental security structure; and last but certainly not least, a twofold change in the continental self-conception.

The Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution

The deteriorating security landscape in Africa, the international community's diminished interest in the continent, and the omnipresent wind of political change quickly forced the OAU to reconsider its own role with regard to Africa's security and development following the end of the Cold War. As early as 1990, Africa's leaders noted the urgent need for collective action to tackle the continent's manifold security problems and following the 1991 landmark all-African conference on 'security, stability, development and cooperation' in Kampala, the continent finally appeared willing to overcome many of the hindrances which had plagued previous attempts at continental security cooperation. The 1992 report of the OAU Secretary-General on conflicts in Africa entitled 'Proposals for an OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution' subsequently argued for a replacement of the OAU's obviously inadequate ad hoc approach to conflict management with an institutionalised framework. The African leaders endorsed the report and the OAU began to conceptualise the structure and process by which it could effectively manage conflicts in Africa. Hardly a year later, the OAU member states assembled in Cairo to formally establish the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. Over the next seven years, the Mechanism's activism was to transform the OAU into a more credible organisation with an increased visibility and an elevated profile in the conflict management arena.²²

International initiatives to promote and support 'African solutions to African problems'

Aware of Africa's manifold security problems, but increasingly reluctant to continue intervening directly in the continent's many troubles, the international community gradually substituted the promotion of home-grown African initiatives for its own physical involvement. The tragic (and, arguably, preventable) events in Somalia and Rwanda in the early 1990s further amplified the pressures on the international community to specify the concepts for such a promotion and advance their speedy implementation. The three most notable concepts to emerge were the African Crisis Response Force/Initiative (ACRF/I); the French programme *Renforcement des Capacités Africaines de Maintien de la Paix* (RECOMP); and the so-called P-3 Initiative.²³

In September 1996, in the midst of both the US presidential elections and the Zairean-Rwanda crisis, it was announced that President Bill Clinton had approved what *The Guardian* called an 'African Crisis Army' and the US Administration referred to as 'African Crisis Response Force' (ACRF).²⁴ According to the newspaper, the latter would be 10,000 strong, trained and equipped by the US and her allies, and dispatched to "countries where insurrection, civil war or campaigns of genocide threaten mass civilian casualties". However, as the initial ACRF concept generated only limited African support, it was subsequently reformulated into the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) and later morphed into Operation Focus Relief, all of which essentially aimed at establishing and training an African peacekeeping force.

The French RECAMP programme, on the other hand, did not focus on the establishment of such a force, but intended to enhance African capacities on a non-discriminatory basis in order to facilitate their participation in peacekeeping operations within the framework of, for example, the UN Stand-by Arrangements System (UNSAS). Thus very much centred on the national level, France has since been extraordinarily active in training and supplying various African armies in order to increase their peacekeeping potential.

In 1997, realising their increasingly wasteful duplication of effort, France, the United Kingdom and the United States announced a joint 'P-3 Initiative' which was to harmonise their various peacekeeping capacity-building programmes in Africa. This initiative was to generate an overarching umbrella for a broad range of valuable individual programmes and seek out areas of possible cooperation. Even though the P-3 Initiative, like RECAMP, was not geared towards the creation of a Pan-African force, it nonetheless helped to prepare the ground for the ASF by increasing African peacekeeping capabilities as well as furthering essential building blocs such as the interoperability between the various emerging regional security initiatives.

Regional organisations as pillars and implementations agencies

In the early 1990s, many observers believed that the increasing devolution of security initiatives would mean the end to any continental conflict management scheme involving the creation of a Pan-African military force. However, quite to the contrary, this devolution (supported and advanced by the international community) was to prove one of the most important milestones on the road to the ASF. Proponents of the idea of a Pan-African force quickly realised that by basing their suggested continental initiative on these regional pillars in which many member states seemed to have more confidence, stakes and (perceived) direct control than in the OAU, they had finally found a way to circumvent many of the problems that had crippled their previous initiatives. It was in this new region-centric spirit that the OAU Chiefs of Defence Staff were able to agree in their second meeting in Harare in 1997 that "the OAU should earmark a brigade-sized contribution to standby arrangements from each of the five African sub-regions

as a starting point [to a continental peacekeeping capability]”.²⁵ Without the obvious success of regional peace operations such as Liberia and the building of reliable regional frameworks on the shoulders of powers who would have continued to oppose the concept of centralising the responsibility for peace on the continent had they not felt some direct ownership in the process, nothing like the ASF would have ever made it past the proposal stage.²⁶

Changes in the continental self-conception

The last development is a twofold change in the continental self-conception. First, following what Uganda’s President Yoweri Museveni had called a ‘decade of awakening’ in the face of an increasingly felt impact of globalisation on Africa’s desolate economies, waning superpower interest and the prevalence of horrific humanitarian catastrophes on the continent, Africa begun to experience a new wave of cooperative Pan-Africanism in the late 1990s.²⁷ The resultant willingness to overcome many of the aforementioned hindrances to effective regional and military cooperation had sprung from the realisation that if Africa wanted to break the cycle of violence, poverty and underdevelopment that had caused so much suffering and kept it persistently at the bottom of every international league table, it finally had to take charge of its own destiny.

Second, the resultant wave of Pan-Africanism differed markedly from the preceding ones. Previous attempts at continental cooperation were dominated by the Westphalian notion of sovereignty so entrenched in the OAU’s Charter since Africa’s heads of state had pledged non-interference in each other’s internal affairs at the organisation’s founding conference in 1963. The wave, however, has been pitting the values of unity and solidarity against those of democracy, accountability, democratic governance and transparent politics, all of which it considers vital correlates to continental security.²⁸ As a result, Africa now seemed ready to make some qualifications to the principle of the sovereign rights of nations, or as Fouad Ajami has put it: “In the face of an absolutist doctrine of the rights of nations, there is now a tentative right to interfere. Man cannot eat sovereignty, we have learned; the order within nations is just as important as that among them.”²⁹ This readiness culminated in the formulation of the AU’s Constitutive Act, which by defining sovereignty in the conditional terms of a state’s capacity and willingness to protect its citizens had shifted the focus from regime security to human security and which even goes so far as to recognise the AU’s right to militarily intervene in the affairs of its member states.³⁰

The African Standby Force

All the above developments contributed in their own way to the establishment of the African Standby Force at the 2002 Durban Summit. However, as the above outline of the history of the concept of a Pan-African military force over nearly five decades has shown,

it should not come as a surprise that its eventual birth was not an easy affair. Indeed, there were such serious disagreements among the summit's participants on the purpose of the future force that the entire concept was at risk. While old-guard leaders such as Colonel Muammar Gaddafi (who actually called for an amendment of the Constitutive Act to include a single army for Africa), President Robert Mugabe and former Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi saw the primary purpose of the force as that of defending Africa from external threats, many of the younger leaders, including Thabo Mbeki, saw the ASF as a peacekeeping force with a capacity to intervene in the continent's internal conflicts.³¹ In the end, the young leaders were able to build on the four developments discussed in the previous section and their version of the ASF was endorsed as part of the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union. Besides this, the protocol also provided for a continental early-warning system, an eminent Panel of the Wise, a Military Staff Committee and a special Peace Fund as the main pillars of the new African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). In February 2004, the latter was completed by the formulation of a Common African Defence and Security Policy which delineates the member states' collective responses to both internal and external security threats.

As currently foreseen, the ASF will consist of five regionally administered standby brigades of about 3,000 troops each, providing the AU with a combined standby capacity of about 15,000 troops trained in peace operations ranging from low-intensity observer missions to full-blown military interventions. Very similar to the proposal made by the delegation from Sierra Leone at the Third Ordinary Session of the OAU Defence Commission in 1965, the concept behind the ASF does not entail the establishment of a standing multinational force for military operations, but is built around an African version of the current UN Standby Arrangement Systems (UNSAS) whereby states earmark and train specific units for AU operations and then keep these units ready for rapid deployment at appropriate notice.³² The five regional headquarters and their planning elements as well as the ASF section in the AU's Peace Support Operations Directorate (PSOD) act as clearinghouses for these national contributions and ensure their interoperability as well as common training standards. In this way, Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs) such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), or ECOWAS are continuously involved in the process of establishing and running the ASF, while the AU bears overall strategic and operational responsibility for the force. By epitomising a much-needed common objective which may finally channel the multiplicity of resources, initiatives and ambitions devoted to African capacity-building into one direction, the ASF thus aids the consolidation of inter-African security cooperation.

Even though the ASF is therefore relatively dissimilar to a fully centralised Pan-African army as envisaged by Kwame Nkrumah, it is not unlike the African Defence Organisation proposed in 1965 or the OAU Defence Force suggested in 1979. In any

way, the fact that it was actually established marks a substantial development in Africa's continental self-emancipation which should be greeted by Africans and the international community alike. It clearly shows that Africa as a continent has begun to accept the responsibility of dealing with its own security problems. It also shows that the common African bond has grown stronger in the face of great challenges and that many of the divisions that thus far have kept the continent's states from cooperating in security matters are no longer unbridgeable.

Obstacles to a Pan-African military force

If what the previous sections have argued is an accurate representation of the quest for and eventual creation of a Pan-African military force, the basic factors responsible for the failures of pre-ASF initiatives as well as the reasons for the success of the current attempt are relatively easy to discern. Whether one talks of a high command, a military standby system or any of the other known appellations referring to some joint African force, it seems that the underlying problem is the inevitable tension between states' perceived need to maintain full control over national capabilities in order to keep peace at home and project strength abroad and the necessity of relinquishing at least certain aspects of their national command authority to a supranational body like the OAU. Many of the above attempts at establishing such a force failed because their institutional setup was not able to resolve this and similar tensions and was thus considered a threat by many states.

Admittedly, through its unique reliance on regional frameworks, the ASF's likelihood of failure in this area is significantly lower than that of its predecessors. The regional character of the ASF ensures that member states of the RECs feel ownership in the process of establishing a continental security architecture while continuing to strengthen their institutional links with the AU. The ASF allows the latter to incorporate all states into a common framework under its coordination without infringing on their national and regional authority or responsibilities. This mutually beneficial symbiosis not only reduces the risk of competition between the continental, regional and national levels of inter-African security cooperation, but also increases the stakes all actors have in the process, builds up helpful peer group pressure, and thus reduces the chances of failure.³³

Nonetheless, the tensions continue to exist and are not likely to disappear any time soon. Consequently, the AU and its international supporters need to ensure that the bridges built over the past five years are not torn down in a moment of crisis, but instead are continuously reinforced. In addition, the AU still has to find persuasive answers to many of the arguments raised against previous Pan-African security initiatives, namely the difficulty of agreeing on a workable funding arrangement (in order to decrease and

eventually erase the ASF's dependence on international financial aid) and ensuring the force's interoperability.

Conclusion

This feature tracked the conceptual evolution of a Pan-African military force from the Union High Command proposed by Kwame Nkrumah in the late 1950s to the African Standby Force formally established in 2002. While the idea of establishing such an African force had merely found a lone and idealistic voice in the Ghanaian president in the early post-colonial years and only occasionally attracted attention thereafter, this feature argued that the concept of today's ASF rests on a broad consensus among Africans and the international community alike which itself is based on a realistic appraisal of the continent's state of affairs. Changes in the geo-political security situation, the continent's organisational landscape and self-conception as well as the level of international support have finally allowed the African Union to centralise the responsibility for peace and security on the continent and institutionalise an appropriate framework. By basing this framework on regional pillars, the AU has successfully circumvented many of the obstacles that have crippled the ASF's many predecessors. Not only does such a pyramidal approach ensure less opposition to a continental initiative, but it also helps to concentrate international capacity-building support. Nonetheless, the ASF will not be operational before 2010 and thus, in light of the ongoing conflicts in Somalia, Congo and Darfur, for the moment the quest continues for an African tranquillity capable of being protected and maintained by Africa herself.³⁴

Notes

- 1 Anonymous, Program of the African Blood Brotherhood, *Communist Review* 2(6), 1922, pp 449–454.
- 2 The Casablanca group consisted of Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Ghana, Guinea and Mali. The Brazzaville group comprised Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Côte d'Ivoire, Dahomey (Benin), Gabon, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), Madagascar, Mauritania, Niger, the Central African Republic, Senegal and Chad. Eventually, the Brazzaville group merged into the Monrovia group resulting in an increased membership of 24 (including Nigeria, Liberia and Togo).
- 3 C Chimelu, *Integration and politics among African states*, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1977, p 164.
- 4 K Nkrumah, *Africa must unite*, Heinemann, London, 1963, p 219.
- 5 For a detailed discussion of the various proposals see C Amate, *Inside the OAU – Pan-Africanism in practice*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1986, Chapter 6.
- 6 See O Fasehun, Nigeria and the issue of an African High Command: Towards a regional and/or continental defence system, *Afrika Spektrum* 80(3), 1980.
- 7 See OAU Proceedings of the 1st Meeting of the Defence Commission, Proposal by Ghana Defl/ Memo 3, Accra, Ghana, 31 October 1963.
- 8 See O Aluko, *Ghana and Nigeria 1957–70. A study in inter-African discord*, Rex Collings, London, 1976, p 130.
- 9 See W Gutteridge, *Military institutions and power in the new states*, Pall Mall Press, London, 1964, p 161.
- 10 See Amate, op cit, p 174.
- 11 See Aluko, op cit, p 137.
- 12 M Wolfers, *Politics in the Organisation of African*

- Unity, London, 1976, p 96.
- 13 D Telli, *Report to the Seventh Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State*, September 1970.
 - 14 *Daily Times* (Lagos), 19 June 1978, p 7.
 - 15 OAU Council of Ministers, CM/Res 635 (XXXI), July 1978.
 - 16 P Esedebe, *Pan-Africanism – The idea and the movement, 1776–1991*, 2nd ed, Howard University Press, Washington, DC, 1994, pp 232–233.
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