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Addis Insight

Casting the spotlight on women's role in ensuring peace and security

In the run-up to the African Union (AU) summit from 7–15 June in Johannesburg, South Africa, the role of women in peace and security are the focus of several discussions among role players in this field. This is to coincide with the AU's focus on 'women's empowerment and development towards the implementation of Agenda 2063' – the AU's theme for this year. Figures on the ground, however, indicate that not enough is being done to ensure gender parity in the security sector in Africa.

Gender mainstreaming is taking centre stage at the AU following the decision by the AU Assembly that 2015 will be 'the year of African women', a theme strongly supported by AU Commission chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. Agenda 2063, the initiative launched by Dlamini-Zuma at the 50th anniversary of the AU/Organisation of African Unity in 2013, also emphasises the empowerment of African women in order to achieve a peaceful and prosperous Africa in the decades to come.

The continent is still a long way from ensuring gender parity in the security sector

In addition, there are a number of other global meetings marking 20 years since the Beijing conference on women and 15 years since the adoption of the crucial United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. The 2015 UN High-Level Review on the implementation of Resolution 1325 and the UN's review of peacekeeping operations are also generating much discussion, particularly in Africa.

Current PSC Chair

H.E Diallo Amina Djibo

Ambassador of Niger to Ethiopia and permanent representative to the AU

Current members of the PSC

Algeria, Burundi, Chad, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, The Gambia, Guinea, Libya, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda

AU increasingly concerned

While the continent is making important strides in including women in all aspects of peacekeeping, security sector reform (SSR) and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, it is still a long way from ensuring gender parity in the security sector. Cheryl Hendricks, a professor at the political studies department at the University of Johannesburg and a specialist on African gender issues, says the AU is increasingly concerned about including more women in the security sector. Dlamini-Zuma's leadership has contributed to this trend.

However, as with other decisions and resolutions of the AU, member states' implementation of its policies remains a challenge.

One example of the inclusion of women in peace and security efforts is the appointment of Senegalese gender activist Bineta Diop as the special envoy of the AU Commission chairperson for women, peace and security. Diop has done important work since her appointment in 2014 and has been visible in conflict areas, notably in

the Central African Republic and South Sudan. She said in an interview in March 2014 that her priorities were the protection of women and children in conflict situations, facilitating the role of women in peace processes and the prevention of armed conflicts.

AU framework document

In addition, the AU Framework on SSR includes a strong gender component, thanks to the contributions made by gender activists during its drafting, says Hendricks.

The framework acknowledges ‘the obligation of member states to apply the principles of gender equality and women’s empowerment, including in SSR processes, as elaborated in the AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa’. ‘The entire SSR process will therefore include women-specific activities, gender awareness and responsive programming, and aim to bring about transformative possibilities for gender equity within the security sector,’ states the document. In the framework document, the AU also states its intention to develop tools for monitoring the implementation of these guidelines.

The framework document, like many other decisions and documents in this regard, builds upon the important UNSC Resolution 1325 that sets out global guidelines for including a gender component in peacekeeping and peace and security. The resolution ‘reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security’. It also urges all actors to include women in UN peace processes.

Facts on the ground show the UN is not prioritising women in peacekeeping

The AU has meanwhile recommended that national governments and regional organisations implement action plans for SSR that include a strong gender component. This is in line with the decision by the January 2009 Assembly of the AU that 2010–2020 will be the ‘women’s decade’. So far, however, only 12 national governments have done so.

African countries making progress

Still, the number of women in the security sector in Africa is growing steadily. ‘Africa leads the way in terms of numbers and frameworks, but just like everywhere else in the world, we are not reaching the 50%,’ said Hendricks, who is coordinating an international conference on gender and SSR in Africa in the run-up to the June AU summit. Facts on the ground also show the UN is not prioritising women in peacekeeping. According to a recent report in *The Guardian*, only 2% of the peacekeepers in the UN mission for the Democratic Republic of Congo (Monusco) are women. According to the same report, South Africa has the biggest contingent of women in the DRC, with 168 women out of the 1 250 South African troops in Monusco.

Women as victims of violence

As part of the discussions on women in the security sector, the plight of women victims of violence provides a strong argument for including more women in the police, defence forces, courts and emergency services of African countries. In March this year, the PSC discussed the issue of women and children falling victim

2%

THE PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN THE
UN MISSION IN THE DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC OF CONGO

to violence in Africa. At the meeting, chaired by Namibian ambassador to the AU Anne Namakau Mutela, the spotlight fell on the plight of women and especially the threat of rape. Mutela said in an interview with the PSC Report there was a need to involve more women in peace activities and that she was 'amazed' by the problems raised by women peacekeepers when she visited the headquarters of the African Mission for Somalia (AMISOM). Women's needs were not taken into account in planning and procurement processes, and their leadership was also necessary in post-conflict and reconstruction processes, she said.

Because Africa is one of the most important areas of concern for the UNSC and the continent that hosts the biggest peacekeeping operations, it is crucial that the gender perspective be included in the review that the UN is undergoing this year. Several meetings have been held to discuss the common African position on this review.

In October this year, the findings of the UN High-Level Review Panel on Women, Peace and Security should also be presented; and it is expected that Africa will figure prominently

in the findings and recommendations of the review. According to UN Women, led by former South African deputy president Phumzile Mlambo-Ncuka, the UN has repeatedly expressed its concern that 'women's perspectives will continue to be underrepresented in conflict prevention, resolution, protection and peacebuilding without a significant shift in how the resolution [1325] is implemented'.

The AU summit will be an opportunity to look at the issue of women in peace and security

The upcoming AU summit will clearly be an opportunity to look at the issue of women in peace and security and the need for important changes in the structure of security forces on the continent. Following the discussions in Johannesburg, clear guidelines on implementation and monitoring will assist governments to ensure the effective implementation of these important decisions.

UN facts and figures – peace and security

At the peace table

- Fewer than 3% of signatories to peace agreements are women.
- Women still represent less than 10% of negotiators at peace tables.
- The first woman to be appointed by the UN as a Special Envoy is Mary Robinson, appointed in 2013.

After conflict

- Female voters are four times as likely as men to be targeted for intimidation in elections in fragile and transitional states.
- There is a significant increase in female-headed households during and after conflict (up to 40% of households), and these are often the most impoverished.

Security and justice

- Rape has been a widespread and systematic tactic in modern wars. Conservative estimates suggest that 20 000 to 50 000 women were raped during the 1992–1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while between 250 000 and 500 000 women and girls were targeted in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.
- Data from 39 countries show that the presence of women police officers correlates positively with reporting of sexual assault. Yet on average, based on 99 countries with available data, women make up only 10% of police forces.

Source: www.unwomen.org

On the Agenda

PSC discusses the African position on the review of UN peace operations



Since Africa is the primary focus of many United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations, it is crucial that its voice is heard in the review of these operations. The changing security context, with much more complex crises than before, and the growing number of peace operations being launched by the African Union (AU) have to be taken into account. Somalia, where the UN is backing the AU-led operation, is an example of possible models of UN–AU cooperation.

On 23 April, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) reviewed the report of the chairperson of the AU Commission on the African position on the review of UN peace operations.

The ongoing review of UN peace operations by the UN High-Level Panel established by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2014 is of huge policy, institutional and political significance to Africa and the AU. For the UN, more than any other part of the world, developments in Africa have a significant impact on its peace operations.

These considerations informed the decision of the AU (as contained in the AU 24th summit outcome document) and its member states to articulate an African position for consideration by the panel. This is in addition to the views that the AU and member states shared during the UN High-Level Panel's weeklong visit to Addis Ababa on the review of UN peace operations in February 2015.

Africa hosts more peacekeeping or peace support operations than any other continent

No part of the world features more prominently in the work of the UN Security Council (UNSC) than Africa. The UNSC dedicates more than 60% of its agenda to African issues. Africa also hosts more peacekeeping or peace support operations than any other continent. Of the 16 ongoing UN peacekeeping operations in the world, nine are in Africa. In terms of personnel numbers and budget size, the largest and most expensive peacekeeping operations are in Africa.

Complex security challenges

A lot has changed in the African security landscape since the earlier review of UN peacekeeping by Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi, captured in what is known as the Brahimi report of 2000. While some important aspects of the current security challenges do not differ from those of the 1990s, the context and complexity of today's security issues present qualitatively different challenges.

Terrorism, insurgency and transnational organised crime have risen to prominence, including in the various conflict areas in which UN peace operations are being conducted. They present asymmetric and hybrid security challenges. These

60%

THE PERCENTAGE OF THE
UNSC AGENDA DEDICATED TO
AFRICAN ISSUES

changing features of the security landscape have come to stretch UN peacekeeping to its limits. As the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the AU mission in Somalia and the UN and AU missions in Mali and the Central African Republic have shown, these dynamics have placed particular strain on the traditional principles of multi-dimensional UN peacekeeping, most notably the use of force and consent.

Peace enforcement vs peacekeeping

As a result some missions have engaged in activities that are traditionally defined as combat or, more accurately, peace enforcement. As far as the AU and the UN are concerned, this has created a major doctrinal gap. While the AU uses the term 'peace operations' for its missions, the UN's preferred terminology is 'peacekeeping'. While the AU doctrine requires it to deploy troops even in the absence of a peace to keep, the UN doctrine bars it from deploying peacekeepers where there is no peace to keep. Accordingly, one of the areas of reform that interest the AU and its member states is the need to bridge the gap between UN doctrine and the demands of the security context to which peace operations are expected to respond.

While the AU uses the term 'peace operations' for its missions, the UN's preferred terminology is 'peacekeeping'

There is recognition among African states and at the AU that some kind of reform of the UN doctrine on the use of force and consent is necessary. Notably, it has become clear that 'peace enforcement' mandates are no guarantee of success. As the Somalia experience showed, it is important that the mandating and implementation of strategic use of force should be linked with political processes aimed at ending the conflict and be strategically directed to give effect to these processes.

Need for African views in UN decision-making

Additionally, unlike the 1990s and the early 2000s, today the AU and regional economic communities have emerged as the major peace and security actors on the continent. Since the AU has come into existence it has deployed more than half a dozen peace operations in Africa. Today, African states are the single largest regional contributors to UN peacekeeping, with Ethiopia the fourth-largest troop-contributing country in the world. The majority of personnel deployed in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa come from African states. In this regard, there is a need for greater representation and consideration of the views of the AU and African member states in UN decision-making processes on peace support operations on the continent.

Due to the nature of the security challenges found today, no single entity can effectively address them. As such (and as repeatedly pointed out during the week-long visit of the UN High-Level Panel to Addis Ababa), more needs to be done to both address the challenges in the UN-AU partnership and take it to a higher and more strategic level. While the UN and the AU have made significant progress in developing an increasingly functional working relationship over the past seven years with respect to peacekeeping, the perennial problem that this partnership has not been able to resolve is the question of sharing the burden of financing AU-led and UN-authorized peacekeeping operations.

Ethiopia

THE 4TH LARGEST
TROOP-CONTRIBUTING COUNTRY
IN THE WORLD

More than just about funding peacekeepers

As AU officials and documents on the subject have pointed out, this issue is about more than funding peace operations, and has a direct impact on the global collective security system anchored in the UN Charter. While it is acknowledged that the AU should mobilise funds for its own operations, the UN and by extension the wider international community also bear responsibility for peace and security in Africa by virtue of the UN's 1945 Charter, which makes the UN responsible for international peace and security.

Since addressing the peace and security challenges in Africa directly enhances international peace and security, other members of the international community should share this burden. To the extent that the African Peace and Security Architecture builds on and shares the burden of the global collective security system, it is incumbent upon the UN to share the burden of Africa's efforts in maintaining peace and security. This is particularly true in cases where the UNSC has not assumed full responsibility but has instead authorised the deployment of AU responses to deal with situations that the UNSC deems to constitute a threat to international peace and security.

Peacekeeping is a collective endeavour and requires that its burden be shared

Somalia an example of shared responsibilities

At a practical level, peacekeeping is a collective endeavour and requires that its burden be shared. It was this appreciation of the shared nature of peacekeeping that led the UN to establish the UN Support Operation to AMISOM (UNSOA), based on UN-assessed contributions for providing institutionalised logistical support to AMISOM. This model involves a satisfactory level of burden sharing by offering predictable and sustainable support to an AU operation and thereby making the endeavour a truly collaborative undertaking. This is an optimal model for dividing labour between the UN and the AU in situations where the UN would not by itself undertake peacekeeping operations. As such the use of UN-assessed contributions for providing institutionalised logistic support to UN-authorized AU missions should not be excluded. There should be willingness to make use of this model on a case-by-case basis, with the caveat that it does not entail automatic UN support for or a blank check to the AU whenever the latter deploys peace support operations.

Despite the fact that the AU and the UN have used a number of peacekeeping partnership models, no thorough and

systematic discussions have been held on identifying more effective and mutually satisfactory models.

Areas of tensions between the UN and the AU

Apart from doctrinal differences, financing and the lack of an agreed-upon peacekeeping partnership model, there are a number of other areas of tension between the AU and the UN that the AU and its member states would like the UN review to address. These include divergent perceptions of the nature of conflict situations, different interpretations of norms such as the protection of civilians, and the role and participation of troop-contributing countries and regional actors in key decisions on UN peacekeeping and other peace support operations undertaken in Africa.

There are a number of areas of tension that the AU and its member states would like the UN review to address

For African states and the AU, areas of particular concern include the attention and resources provided for both conflict prevention (including addressing the root causes of conflict) and post-conflict reconstruction and development (PCRD). Thus far both the AU and the UN have tended in practice to make much more use of peacekeeping operations than conflict prevention and PCRD. Additionally, less diplomatic capital and resources are allocated to conflict-prevention efforts and PCRD than to conflict management efforts involving the deployment of troops. Accordingly, there is an expectation that the review will also address conflict prevention and PCRD issues, including the design and application of UN political offices and peace-building missions.



Situation Analysis

The world's attention is on Libya as migrants die leaving its shores

The growing number of migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean from Libya, often at their peril, has put the spotlight on the dire situation in the country. The activities of the Islamic State (ISIS) in Libya have also been cause for concern worldwide. The PSC discussed the Libyan crisis on 20 April and strongly condemned the recent killing of Ethiopians by ISIS in Libya.

Libya is fast becoming a failed state. The country continues to suffer at the hands of the scores of militias and armed groups that control the different cities. It has also become a safe haven for transnational terror, human and arms trafficking and criminal organisations, including the fast-growing ISIS. Ansar Al-Shari'a, the largest of the radical Islamist groups in Libya, recently pledged allegiance to ISIS.

The prospect of the two rival governments reaching a comprehensive deal soon is dim

Continued violence

Meanwhile Libya has two rival parliaments and governments fighting for control of the state. The conflict is deepening divisions, ruining lives and destroying the country's economic infrastructure and institutions. The Tobruk-based and internationally recognised government of Libya has scaled up its campaign to regain control of the capital Tripoli. On 18 April, more than 20 people were reportedly killed in fighting between the rival factions outside Tripoli. The clash was between pro-government forces and members of the Fajr Libya militia alliance in Tajoura, 30km east of Tripoli. Two days later the Spanish embassy in Tripoli was targeted by a bomb as part of a string of attacks on foreign missions in the country.

Despite encouraging developments, the prospect of the two rival governments reaching a comprehensive deal soon is dim, and is further complicated by the presence of uncontrolled and uncontrollable armed groups like ISIS.

Hopes of a new deal

The African Union (AU) recently stepped up its efforts to try and solve the Libyan crisis. On 1 April 2015 the third meeting of the International Contact Group for Libya (ICG-L) took place at ministerial level in Niamey, Niger. The meeting, which was co-chaired by Smaïl Chergui AU Commissioner for Peace and Security and Aïchata Boulama Kané Foreign Minister of Niger, expressed concern at the continuation of violence and spread of terrorism in Libya, called for an immediate and unconditional cessation of hostilities and backed the UN-led talks. The group commended the adoption of Resolution 2214 (2015) of 27 March 2015, which considered the request by the Libyan government to have the United Nations (UN) arms embargo on Libya revised.

In January 2015 a series of UN-brokered talks took place in Geneva between groups representing the two parliaments. This was followed by a unilateral truce declared by the Libyan army. However, the ceasefire did not hold and the country witnessed a fresh spate of violence. There were serious differences between the parties on major issues, the composition of the delegation and the venue of the talks. On 24 March the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) unveiled a six-point plan to end the crisis, ahead of the next round of talks between the warring parties. The proposal includes the creation of a unity transitional government to oversee the design and adoption of a new constitution and the transition to a democratically elected government.

The UN believes that the different groups, which include radical Islamists, secular groups and tribal militias, are running out of resources or support both internally and externally, and that the Libyan public is reaching the limits of what it is prepared to tolerate. The head of UNSMIL and UN Special Representative Bernardino León says this provides a good opportunity for effective mediation.

The UN envoy announced that preparations were underway for the armed factions to enter into direct talks for the first time. This followed a meeting on 19 April between representatives of the two rival parliaments, both claiming to be the legitimate government of Libya. The meeting started UN-led talks at the Moroccan resort of Skhirat. According to reports of the meeting, the talks succeeding in narrowing the differences between the rival parliaments on some points, but they were still far from reaching an agreement to end the violence and form a unity government.

León announced that the two 'governments' had reached a draft agreement, raising hopes over the possibility of sealing a final comprehensive deal. León stated that the document was well received by both parties and said that 'Eighty per cent of the text in this draft is something that the parties can agree [upon].' The parties took a two-week break to return to their bases for consultation on the terms of the new agreement. According to the UN, the final accord could be concluded after these consultations. León briefed the UN Security Council on progress on 29 April.

Continued brutality and expansion of ISIS

One of the groups that are exploiting the instability and lack of effective government and order in Libya is ISIS. The group has now consolidated its presence and expanded its operations and activities in Libya. On 19 April ISIS released a video showing the beheading and assassination of 30 Ethiopian Christians in two locations in Libya. The killings, which happened two months after the beheading of 21 Egyptian

Coptic Christians in Libya by the same group, reportedly took place in Fezzan Province, in the south, and Barqa Province, in the east of the country. The video caused an international outcry and strengthened the call for a coordinated response to fight the group in Libya and elsewhere. The UN, United States (US), European Union (EU) and governments in Africa and the Middle East strongly condemned the latest atrocities.

In a press statement dated 20 April 2015, the AU condemned what it called the 'inhuman and barbaric killings' of Ethiopians in Libya by ISIS. The statement emphasised the urgency for coordinated international action to address the situation.

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The number of radical organisations pledging allegiance to ISIS is expanding. Various militant armed groups in Egypt, Algeria and Nigeria have declared their loyalty to ISIS and its self-declared caliphate. It is feared that the group might use the vacuum in Libya to spread its ideology, influence, network and mechanisms to the Sahel and beyond.

This concern is shared by Libya's northern neighbours and the EU following a series of terrorist attacks and foiled attempts in recent months by groups and individuals with ISIS links. The fact that hundreds of Europeans are joining ISIS and the impact they have upon their return to Europe, also remain a big worry for Brussels.

The migration disaster

Since the overthrow of former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya has not had any form of effective government. The country, divided along ideological, religious, regional and clan lines, has become the single biggest transit point for immigrants crossing to Europe. The militias connected to the various rings of human traffickers are using the opportunity to raise funds for their campaigns.

April 2015 proved to be the worst month for migrants attempting to cross to Europe. Following the reported deaths of around 1 300 migrants in three incidents in less than two weeks, debates surrounding rescue operations and related issues such as the migration crisis and the situation in Libya have dominated the media. The latest disaster brings the number of deaths to 1 750 since the beginning of the year.

Frustrated Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, who refers to the traffickers as 'the slave traders of the 21st century',

has been calling for direct action against people smugglers. EU leaders are considering different proposals on how to respond to the crisis, including a pilot project that offers 5 000 resettlement places for migrants 'qualifying for protection'.

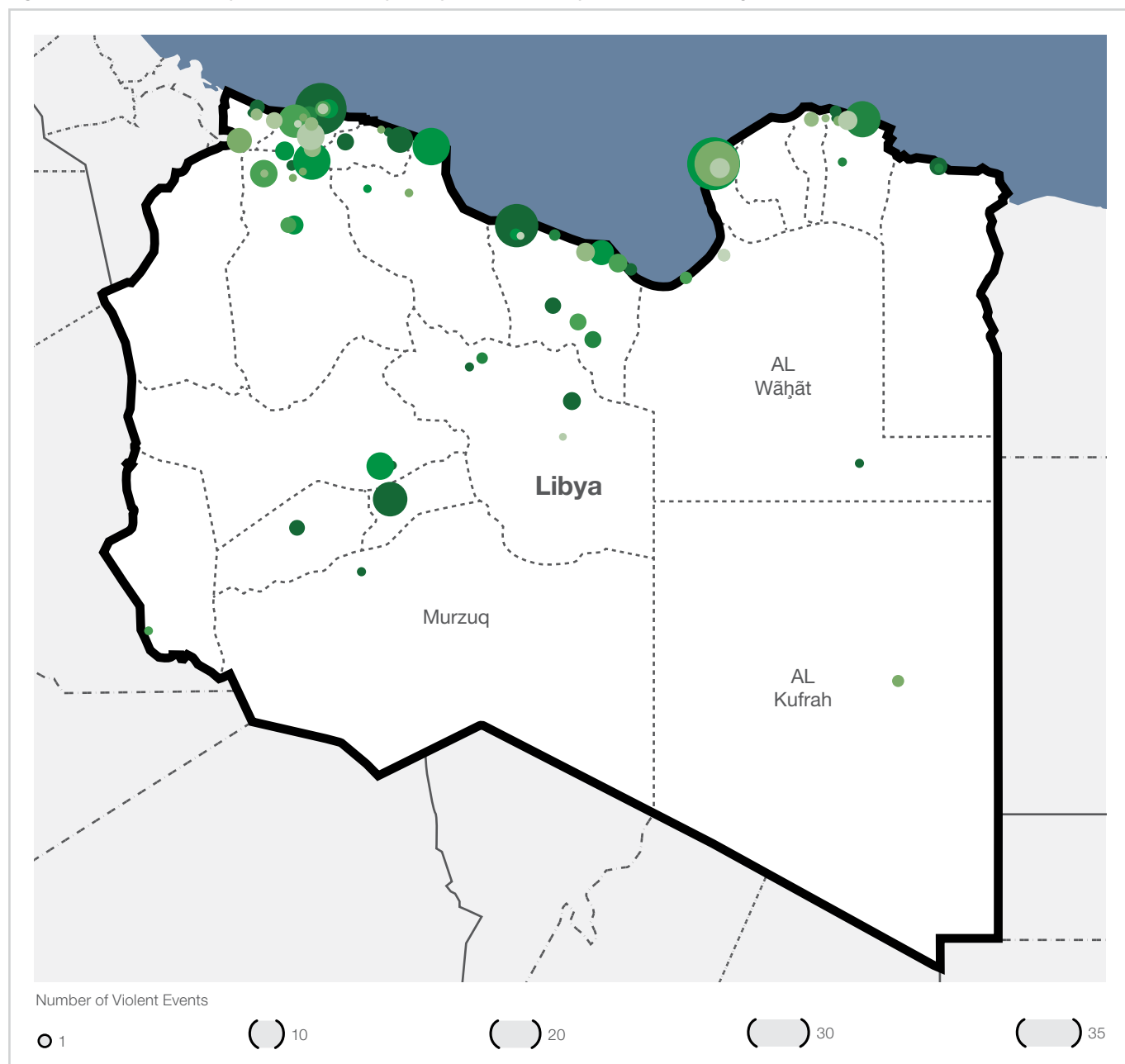
The situation in Libya was discussed at the EU Foreign Affairs Council on 20 April in Luxembourg. Following the emergency meeting of EU interior and foreign ministers, the EU announced that it was considering sending warships to the Libyan coast to combat oil and arms smugglers. However, the proposal was met with strong opposition from some EU members who feared such actions could encourage more migrants to take to sea

hoping to be rescued by the warships and taken to Europe. At the moment, the EU is divided on how to respond to the immigration crisis. However, addressing the Libyan crisis is at the top of the EU agenda related to responses to the disaster.

Scheduled mini summit of the Gulf states

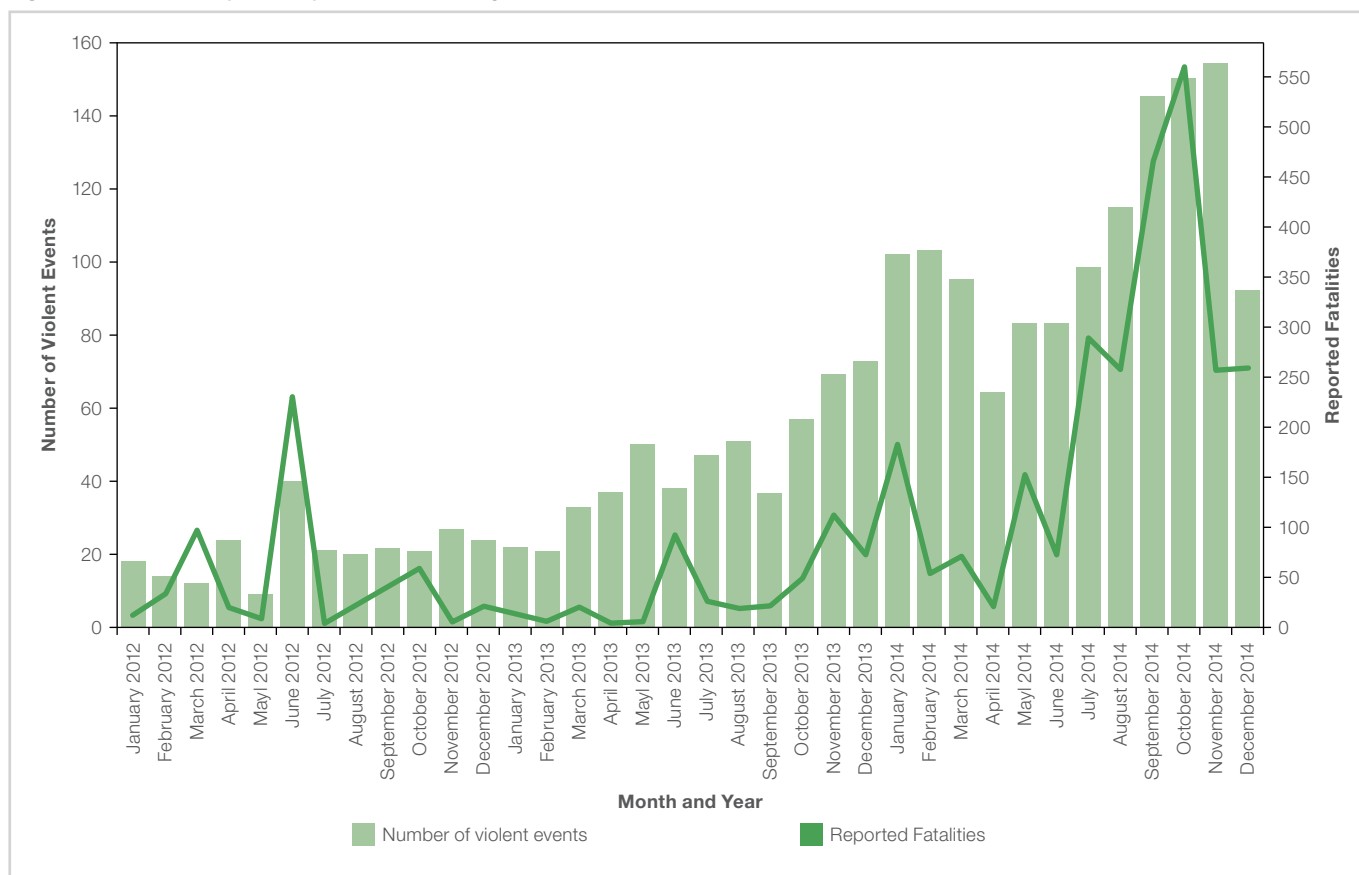
While hosting Renzi at the White House, US President Barack Obama discussed the situation in Libya with the Italian prime minister. In a subsequent press conference Obama urged the Gulf nations to do everything possible stop the violence in Libya and create grounds for establishing an effective

Figure 1: Violent events in Libya between 1 January–1 May 2015 were mostly in and around the big urban centers



Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project

Figure 2: Violence in Libya steadily escalated following the death of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011



Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project

government in the country. Obama criticised the proxy war that is allegedly being fought in Libya between the powers in the Middle East and the Islamic world, and accused some countries of fanning the flames of the military conflict.

The US hosted representatives of the Gulf Cooperation Council – from Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – at Camp David on 13 May 2015 to forge a coordinated response to the Libyan crisis.

Efforts to lift the UN arms embargo

The Tobruk Parliament, based in the east of the country, which is considered to be the centre of the secular forces, is scaling up its efforts to arm itself against the Islamists based in the west of the country. Libyan Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thinni has been critical of the UN-imposed arms embargo on Libya and claims it is emboldening the radical groups, including ISIS. Permanent members of the UN Security Council, including France, the United Kingdom and the US, have so far refused to lift the 26 February 2011 arms embargo imposed on Libya as set out in UN Resolution 1970.

Thinni's government has repeatedly requested the UN to lift the embargo to fight radical groups and Islamist militias, but

with no success. UN Resolution 2214 (2015) referred to above however constitutes a modification of the 2011 embargo.

Documentation AU documents

Press release 20 April 2015 The African Union strongly condemns the killing of African nationals by terrorist elements in Libya (<http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/auc.com.killings.libya.20-04-2015.pdf>)

Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on Libya 27 April 2015 (<http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/auc.rpt.libya.psc500.27.04.2015.pdf>)

UN documents

Resolution 1970 26 February 2011 (<http://www.icc-cpi.int/NR/rdonlyres/081A9013-B03D-4859-9D61-5D0B0F2F5EFA/0/1970Eng.pdf>)



PSC Interview

Many lessons were learnt from the AU mission against Ebola

Dr Benjamin Djoudalbaye, head of mission support operations at the African Union Support to Ebola Outbreak in West Africa (ASEOWA), speaks about the mission that was launched in August last year – the first of its kind for the African Union (AU). Last week, on 23 April, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) received a briefing on Ebola and the post-Ebola recovery in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

There is a perception that the Ebola epidemic is over, but then again one realises it might take some time before the virus is completely eradicated. Is this the case?

When it comes to epidemics like Ebola, one has to be very careful, but it is true that we are nearing the end. We are no longer in September 2014 when we saw more than 10 000 cases per week. Today [21 April] we are in our 23rd day without one single case in Liberia. If we continue like this for the next 20 days, the country can be declared Ebola free. The same goes for Sierra Leone, where we now have only three confirmed cases, none of them dating from this past week.

With epidemics like Ebola, one has to be very careful, but it is true that we are nearing the end

However, the situation is still unstable in Guinea. For example, the Boke municipality, where we never had any cases before, is now affected. In fact, the epicentre of the epidemic has shifted towards Basse-Guinee and we are really worried about the situation. This is where everything started and we have to be extra vigilant to make sure we get rid of the epidemic.

The PSC has been taking the lead on this issue as far as the AU is concerned. Does that mean it is more than just a health issue?

The PSC evoked article 15F of its charter for the deployment of ASEOWA. Responding to all human crises is part of its mandate. It is not only about armed conflicts. The PSC took the right decisions at the right time. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared Ebola a global health threat on 8 August 2014. On 19 August, before anyone else did so, the PSC decided to deploy personnel. It was a visionary decision.

Less than a month later, we were on the spot, ready to intervene. Our head of mission, Major General Julius Oketta, arrived in Liberia on 15 September. At the high point of our engagement we had 835 people deployed. That shows that the PSC fulfilled its mandate.

Yet the first meeting was already in April 2014. What happened between then and August?

In April there was in fact a scheduled meeting between African ministers of health, the WHO and the AU, which was then overtaken by events and devoted to the outbreak of Ebola. At that time, we thought that the best solution was to ask for help from those African countries that already had experience of Ebola outbreaks. Subsequently, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and others sent experts to the three affected countries. But even the most pessimistic forecasts did not indicate that the epidemic would spiral out of control. On the contrary, we were told that in May the epidemic would start slowing down in Liberia and Guinea.

Even the most pessimistic forecasts did not indicate that the epidemic would spiral out of control

In the past, when an outbreak slowed down, that meant that the epidemic was coming to an end. But then, suddenly, there was a second wave of the epidemic in June and July. Besides, this is the first time the world experienced a crisis of this magnitude.

ASEOWA is a civilian and military mission. How did these two work together?

The army has specialised medical units that are very readily deployable and we wanted to learn from them. This was the first time we undertook such an operation as the AU and even globally, to counter an epidemic like Ebola. But in reality there weren't many soldiers on the ground. The head of the mission is a major general and there are two colonels for logistics, but the military component of the mission isn't really big.

What are the lessons from the AU deployment?

There are many lessons. Firstly, I have to say that today we do have capacity on the continent to handle any epidemic that might break out in future. The figures themselves show that: we trained more than 20 000 people; we contributed to the training of international teams, from Cuba and China for example. We have been at the forefront of the epidemiological fight against Ebola, but also in terms of psychological support and social mobilisation.

The second lesson is that we have realised the weaknesses of our health systems in Africa, notably in the three affected countries. The reasons are clear. Liberia and Sierra Leone are post-conflict countries that struggled to get their health

services back on track. So when a virus like Ebola strikes, it destroys everything they have started to build up. Guinea has in the last few years experienced an unprecedented political crisis and they haven't had time to improve their health systems. Still, it is possible to control the virus, like Nigeria and Senegal managed to do.

Finally, I have to say that all the organisations that deployed health workers had at least one infection and we didn't have any. This is very important. Also, for the first time since Ebola was first detected in 1976, a medical facility registered a survival rate of over 66%. We managed this in a centre in Sierra Leone that was 100% managed by the AU.

This was the first time we undertook such an operation as the AU

What have been the main obstacles? Are there any problems that you did not manage to overcome?

When we arrived in Liberia, it was when everyone was leaving and we were alone with MSF [Médecins sans Frontières]. It was difficult in terms of budgetary planning because the price of some equipment had doubled or tripled and bringing in medicine was difficult due to the embargo.

In addition, Ebola broke out in an environment where people had no prior knowledge of it. ... The educational task will have to continue. It has been easier in Liberia or Sierra Leone because people understood what had to be done, but in Guinea there is still strong resistance, notably in the Basse-Côte region around Conakry. Here the treatment centres were attacked, vehicles set alight and personnel were attacked on their way to work.

What is your view of the economic situation in the affected countries?

Children missed a lot of school. One lost year means 10 years of human development that is lost. We also see businesses suffering and there are many families without any income. To respond to this, the AU is organising a conference in Equatorial Guinea in August on the post-Ebola reconstruction. It will be in the context of 'Africa helping itself'. All aspects will be discussed. It will be Africa's response, even if there have already been similar meetings elsewhere.

Could one say that such a crisis has brought Africans together, or did the three countries find themselves isolated?

My response is twofold. There was certainly an unprecedented show of solidarity on the continent. Some countries sent

financial and human resources, by way of the AU. Some private companies responded, the SMS campaign launched in 44 countries is still ongoing. ... It was very innovative in terms of the mobilisation and if we continue like this we will find that tomorrow we can face our problems on our own. But at the same time, some countries placed restrictions on entry, some airline companies stopped their flights to the affected countries. Even abroad, some of the citizens of these countries were stigmatised. We have to launch an information campaign because we don't know how this started in West Africa and it could break out anywhere else. No one is completely safe.

There was certainly an unprecedented show of solidarity on the continent

How do you judge the international reaction? A lot of money was promised, but did it arrive?

Not all of it arrived. Some funds were certainly paid out, but many promises were not kept.

Do you have enough funds to continue with the mission until August [when its current mandate expires]?

We are busy reducing our numbers and I think we will be able to last up to the end. Between now and 16 May, 196 Nigerians, who were the first to arrive, will go home. Two weeks after it will be 187 Ethiopians who will return. Then the Congolese, the Kenyans ... if there are no setbacks in controlling the virus, it should be fine.

What does the AU need to do to prepare for such a problem? Are we going to see an African centre for disease control in the very near future?

All our partners are ready to help with this project of an African centre for the prevention and control of diseases; that is well into the planning stage. The heads of state have already recommended it and it will be set up very quickly. The centre will work as a network. All five regions will each have a centre. We have to do the evaluation to decide where they will be. The aim is to have a centre in every country within the next 15 years, so we can detect and react swiftly. I am very optimistic, because what we saw with Ebola we never want to see repeated anywhere else. These lessons will help us build a better future.

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The Institute for Security Studies is an African organisation that aims to enhance human security on the continent. It does independent and authoritative research, provides expert policy analysis and advice, and delivers practical training and technical assistance.

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