



Peace & Security Council Report

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PSC interview with Nasser Bourita, Moroccan minister of foreign affairs

The AU navigates the COVID-19 storm

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic the African Union (AU) has been obliged to move all of its meetings and summits in recent months online, with some success. However, it has not been all smooth sailing.

Some tricky negotiations, such as those around the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), have been delayed. The jury is also still out on whether the AU's all-important extraordinary summit on 'Silencing the Guns' and the AfCFTA will be held in South Africa.

Moving to a virtual space owing to the continent-wide lockdowns has arguably created opportunities for some. It has allowed the AU Commission, member states and civil society organisations to convene meetings much faster and cheaper than would have been the case otherwise.

Lobbying in the context of multilateral diplomacy, which by nature relies on behind-the-scenes interactions, has been more difficult

However, lobbying in the context of multilateral diplomacy, which by nature relies on behind-the-scenes interactions, has been more difficult, although not impossible in a digital space.

No face-to-face lobbying for commission elections

One of the most important issues to be finalised by the AU this year is the election of a new AU Commission. By early September 2020, 89 candidates had thrown their hat into the ring for the six commissioner positions and there were four candidates for the position of deputy chairperson. So far, indications are that the current chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat, is opposed in his bid for a second term.

A panel of eminent persons will now examine the candidates on the basis of skills and competency, together with technical experts. A final list of candidates will be drawn up for voting by the heads of state (for the chairperson and deputy chairperson) and the executive council (for commissioners) at the 34th AU Ordinary Summit in January/February 2021.

According to insiders, COVID-19 lockdowns and restricted travel have made lobbying for positions at the AU Commission more difficult.

While member states and the AU Commission can be congratulated for keeping to the election timetable, the fact that many officials are not in Addis Ababa and that envoys cannot travel around the continent to lobby for positions will complicate the situation for those who are vying for the various positions.

Current PSC Chairperson

HE Mohamed Idriss Farah,
ambassador of Djibouti to Ethiopia
and Permanent Representative to
the African Union.

PSC members

Algeria, Benin, Burundi, Cameroon,
Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia,
Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi,
Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal

A summit on Silencing the Guns in Johannesburg?

Meanwhile, South Africa had planned on hosting the extraordinary summit on ‘Silencing the Guns’ – the AU theme for 2020 – in Cape Town on 30 May, but this has now been postponed to 5 December.

South Africa’s ambassador to Addis Ababa, Xolisa Makaya, told the PSC Report that the country was doing everything possible to make sure this was a face-to-face meeting and that delegates would be able to travel to Johannesburg.

South Africa has experienced one of the toughest lockdowns and by far the highest number of COVID-19 cases. The country announced the opening of international borders by 1 October, but a final list of countries for which borders will remain closed is yet to be published.

The aim of the summit is to discuss progress made with the 2016 Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns by Year 2020 and to address some of the crisis hotspots on the continent.

The emerging terrorism threat in Mozambique – the first such occurrence in Southern Africa – is also expected to be on the agenda of the Johannesburg summit. Many organisations and observers in Mozambique and the region have urged the AU and the regional Southern African Development Community to step in to address the insurgency in the northern Cabo Delgado province.

Other issues, such as the crises in Libya, South Sudan, the Central African Republic and Mali, are also expected to be discussed. Of the issues that were on the agenda during South Africa’s chair at the beginning of the year, notably Libya and South Sudan, not much progress has been made. President Cyril Ramaphosa has largely left these crises to other actors such as Morocco, which has been active in trying to resolve the Libyan impasse.

One of the most important issues to be finalised by the AU this year is the election of a new AU Commission

Ramaphosa has, however, been successful in establishing the AU as the main mediator in the crisis around the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. This was after the United States, the initial mediator, failed to make any headway and the issue was to be tabled for discussion by the United Nations Security Council. South Africa felt the issue should be handled by the AU.

Ramaphosa convened several online meetings of the AU Bureau of five heads of state, as well as the concerned states. South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Naledi Pandor and the expert negotiators on the issue have followed up on these.

5 December

THE EXTRAORDINARY
AU SUMMIT
IN JOHANNESBURG

Ethiopia has since managed to begin filling the dam, as it had wished to do in July 2020, but several issues remain outstanding. It was hoped a resolution could be found by the end of September.

The upheaval caused by COVID-19, as well as sporadic Internet shutdowns in Addis Ababa – which compromised the option of holding virtual meetings – also forced the postponement of two important mid-year meetings of the AU ministers of foreign affairs (the Executive Council) and the mid-year coordination meetings between the AU and the regional economic communities (RECs). These will now take place on 13–14 October and 22 October respectively.

AfCFTA negotiations delayed

Another AU extraordinary summit – on the AfCFTA – had been planned for 30 May 2020. This has been moved to 5 December, just before the Silencing the Guns summit. These will be the 13th and 14th extraordinary summits of the AU.

Many AfCFTA issues remain outstanding and trading under the new agreement did not start on 1 July 2020, as was the plan. The start of trading has now been postponed to 1 January 2021. The new headquarters of the AfCFTA Secretariat in Accra, which is led by former South African trade official Wamkele Mene, was officially inaugurated in the presence of Ghana's President Nana Akufo-Addo on 17 August 2020.

Many AfCFTA issues remain outstanding and trading under the new agreement did not start on 1 July 2020, as was the plan

Experts see the AfCFTA as one of the most important achievements of the AU in recent years. They view it as a mechanism for African countries to achieve greater economic growth, which will be crucial in the post-COVID reconstruction period.

AU–EU meetings to be postponed

Crucial talks between the AU and European Union (EU) were also scheduled for the end of October, but these are likely to be postponed until 2021. The EU–AU summit is of strategic importance to both Europe and the AU, following their first commission-to-commission summit in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire at the end of 2017.

Outstanding issues include the harmonisation of the EU–AU strategy with the post-Cotonou negotiations being held within the framework of the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of states. Another tricky issue is the return of cultural goods from Europe to Africa.

A proposal is on the table for 2021 to be dubbed 'The year of arts, culture and heritage in Africa'. If this happens, the issue of restitution is bound to be at the top of the AU's agenda. A decision on the theme of the year will be made at the Executive Council meeting in mid-October.

1 January
2021

AfCFTA COUNTRIES TO
START TRADING

Safeguarding Sudan's precarious peace agreement

Sudan's transitional government is expected to sign a comprehensive peace agreement with armed rebel groups of the coalition Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) on 3 October 2020.

Local, regional and international actors have hailed the initial peace agreement signed on 31 August in Juba, South Sudan as an important step towards ending Sudan's protracted conflicts in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile states.

A comprehensive peace agreement will be a major achievement in the transition period, which has set sustainable peace as the first goal of Sudan's political transition. Many other processes depend upon the peace agreement, including the formation of the transitional Legislative Council, the appointment of civilian state governors, transitional justice, and security sector reform (SSR).

This is not the first peace agreement signed by the armed groups. The previous agreements, reached before the transition, have all failed to end Sudan's civil wars. This is mainly because not all armed groups signed the agreements and their provisions were not fully implemented.

Given the challenges facing the implementation of the peace agreement and the goal of comprehensive peace, the AU should be more engaged in the process, not only as guarantor of the peace agreement but also by providing political and technical support.

The AU can provide technical support in the process of consolidating the various peace agreements, resolve disputes over the interpretation of the agreement's provisions, reconcile the competing positions of different actors, and support further negotiation with holdout rebel groups.

Unresolved issues

Two armed rebel groups – the Sudan People's Liberation Movement – North (SPLM-North), led by Abdelaziz El-Hilu, and the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM), led by Abdelwahid el-Nur from Darfur – have refused to sign the latest agreement, on the grounds that the peace process has not addressed fundamental conflict drivers. This is a major setback in reaching comprehensive peace in Sudan.

Historical drivers of Sudan's civil wars have been the marginalisation of peripheral regions in the socio-economic and political sphere, and issues of citizenship related to the 'Arabisation' and 'Islamisation' policies of successive Sudanese governments.

The wealth-sharing component of the peace agreement prioritises resource redistribution and restitution

In a bid to address these grievances, the latest peace agreement includes a power-sharing arrangement at the national and state level to ensure equitable political representation of the different regions. It allocates seats to armed rebel representatives in the Sovereign Council, the executive and the transitional Legislative Council, as well as state governorships. It also provides for the integration of these groups into the Sudanese Armed Forces.

The wealth-sharing component of the peace agreement prioritises resource redistribution and restitution. It will, however, be difficult to implement these provisions as long as armed groups in Darfur and the two regions are not part of the peace agreement.

While the SLM is refusing to take part in negotiations, El-Hilu is engaging with the transitional government. The two parties signed a joint agreement on 3 September on including discussions on the relationship between state and religion in the peace negotiations. The peace talks will resume after informal consultations with various Sudanese political parties on how religion and politics can be separated.

Previous peace agreements with rebels failed to address this relationship, leading to the secession of South Sudan and continued fighting in the southern regions of Sudan.

Unity of the rebel coalition

The implementation of the latest peace agreement will also depend on the continued unity of the SRF, a coalition

of armed rebel groups from Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, and political groups from northern, central and eastern Sudan.

The SRF have taken part in peace negotiations in five different peace processes (tracks) that have led to multiple peace agreements. The immediate test of its unity will be the process of consolidating these agreements into one comprehensive deal, with competing positions and provisions arising from fundamental differences.

While the rebel coalition has so far demonstrated its ability to work together, it has in the past been plagued by political and ideological disagreements. Its unity may still be threatened by major differences about citizenship issues, the state/religion relationship, governance structure, states' autonomy and legal provisions for the possibility of states' secession.

The SRF have taken part in peace negotiations in five different peace processes

Sudanese rebel groups and coalitions have a history of splintering. Most recently, the Sudan Liberation Movement led by Minni Minnawi (SLM-MM) announced its withdrawal from the SRF in May 2020. In the past, such divisions have led to splinter groups' rejecting peace agreements, resulting in continued fighting.

In addition to fundamental political and ideological differences, the SRF faces internal disputes arising from personal ambitions, ethnic competition and regional tensions. These may come to the fore as the different groups vie for political representation through their ethnic constituencies.

Without continued unity, the rebel coalition will be unlikely to achieve the change it fought for in Sudan's political arena as the transition into political parties begins. The rebels' ability to see through the implementation of the peace agreement will depend on the strength of their alliance.

Reconfiguring the balance of power

The SRF is a signatory to the Freedom and Change political accord of the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), the civilian component of the Sovereign Council currently leading Sudan. Armed rebel groups are therefore part of the revolutionary forces that helped bring about the political transition in Sudan.

However, the ability of the armed groups to continue working with members of the FFC has been tested during the transition period.

The rebel coalition accused the FFC of disregarding the provisions of an informal agreement between the two parties concluded in Addis Ababa on 25 July 2019. Consequently, the FFC has only been marginally involved in the peace negotiations. This will create serious challenges in implementing the peace agreement in the post-transition period, when political actors, most of whom are currently part of the FFC coalition, take over government.

3 October
2020

THE PLANNED SIGNING OF
A PEACE AGREEMENT

Allocating top political positions to the SRF, including in the Sovereign Council, the transitional Legislative Council and state governorships, will significantly alter the dynamics and power relations between major transition actors.

Unless the SRF and FFC overcome their differences and work together to implement the peace agreement, the power shift will be to the disadvantage of the FFC, in terms of the military. This will have serious consequences not only for the implementation of the peace agreement but also for the goals of the entire transition period.

Support for the peace process

The United Nations (UN) and AU should support the peace process going forward, especially as the implementation of the peace agreement and the outstanding negotiations face considerable challenges.

The Implementation Matrix for the peace agreement has been finalised and the technical committees have signed the document. It includes timelines for the rebels' returning to Sudan, signing of the final agreement, beginning the major processes of reshuffling the government and power-sharing agreement, and implementing the quotas in the Sovereign Council and the transitional Legislative Council.

SSR and the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of rebels have been scheduled for the next 16 months. This will be preceded by further negotiations and training on the SSR and DDR processes, as per international standards.

The AU should clarify what technical support it will be providing the implementation of the peace agreement and the outstanding peace processes

While the UN has issued a mandate to the newly established Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) to provide support for the implementation of the peace agreement, the AU is yet to issue a mandate for the peace process. This is despite requests from the negotiating parties for the AU to 'issue a new mandate on Sudan peace negotiations'.

The AU was instrumental in brokering the political agreement that led to a peaceful transfer of power from the military to the hybrid civilian-military Sovereign Council. Without a clear mandate, however, it has since been only marginally involved in the peace process, through the UN–AU Mission in Darfur (UNAMID).

Going forward, the AU should clarify what technical support it will be providing the implementation of the peace agreement and the outstanding peace processes, before the end of UNAMID's mandate in 2020.

The AU should also finalise as soon as possible its Sudan Peacebuilding Strategy, currently under development. The strategy will help to provide direction on its engagement in Sudan's peace process.

The
SPLM-North
and
the SLM

REFUSE TO SIGN THE
PEACE AGREEMENT

Libyan talks raise hopes of reunification

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC), on 15 September 2020, renewed the mandate of its Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). This followed talks between the two rival Libyan administrations – the Tobruk-based Parliament led by Aguila Saleh and loyal to Khalifa Haftar, and the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) led by Fayez al-Sarraj in Tripoli. (Also see an interview with Nasser Bourita, Morocco's minister of foreign affairs on page 14).

The negotiations, held from 6–10 September in Bouznika, Morocco, resulted in a compromise between these two main factions, and are therefore touted as a success. However, it remains to be seen whether the Bouznika talks will have a positive impact, unlike the Skhirat Agreement, which saw the formation of the GNA and the advent of Sarraj as prime minister.

Many hurdles still to clear

Libya today is back where it was before Haftar launched a crusade in April 2019 to conquer Tripoli and take over the reins of the country. While this is preferable to the fighting that has lasted more than a year, much remains to be done to allow the country to heal.

The Bouznika talks have laid the foundations to kickstart the reunification of Libya. The compromise seeks to usher in a transitional period where the Tobruk administration and the Tripoli GNA will work together. In addition, the new transitional authorities will have representatives from the country's three main historical regions: Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan.

A similar proposal had been made following the signing of the Paris Accord between Libyan belligerents in May 2018, which aimed for a speedy move towards elections by December 2018. At the time Prof. Moncef Djaziri of the Lausanne Institute of Political Studies recommended a two-year transition period that would address all outstanding issues and set the country on a path to durable peace.

The proposal included a two-year political transition whereby Libya would be run by a dual executive power consisting of a triumvirate of respected figures from Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan. This presidential council would be supported by a government of technocrats.

Their mission would be to reunify state institutions; rebuild a professional national army; secure the country's natural resources; finalise the constitutional reform process leading to a new constitution for Libya; prepare and pass a new electoral law; and plan and conduct an electoral process that would ultimately lead to a transfer of power to elected authorities.

This executive power would be supported by consultative institutions such as an assembly of ethnic groups and an assembly of civil society, Djaziri said.

These are, in essence, the main outstanding issues all Libyan sides must agree to work on.

This is particularly pressing in a context where the Libyan people have grown increasingly frustrated with the protracted instability and fighting, in the face of a state that has disintegrated and is failing to provide basic services.

Libya today is back where it was before Haftar launched a crusade in April 2019 to conquer Tripoli and take over the reins of the country

Citizens have had enough of long-running blackouts, the rising cost of living and a hard currency shortage in a substantially cash-based economy. They are running out of patience with the seeming inability of either the Tobruk or the Tripoli government to respond to their needs while embroiled in a war that is causing or exacerbating these ills.

Protests have erupted in Tripoli and Tobruk against the governments in each city. As a result, the Tobruk government has resigned. On 16 September Sarraj also announced that he would be leaving at the end of October to allow transitional institutions to begin their tenure.



Controlling the country's resources

The Libyan situation has been complicated by two factors: the battle for access to and control of the country's resources; and the internationalisation of the civil war.

The issues around access and control of resources are best illustrated by Haftar's eight-month blockade of Libya's oil installations and ports in the east of the country. Oil exports were effectively halted and the economy crippled, with the local currency weakened, revenue losses of nearly US\$ 10 billion, and dire consequences for energy generation and provision for the Libyan people.

On 18 September Haftar announced an end to the blockade, but demanded that certain conditions be met for it to be effective: oil revenues (controlled by the GNA) must be distributed equitably and the money not used to support terrorism. This followed negotiations in Russia between GNA representative Ahmed Miitig (vice-president of the Tripoli presidential council) and Capt. Khaled Khalifa Haftar (Haftar's son).

The question of resources is central to the emerging transition, since internal and external interests in terms of accessing and controlling Libya's resources do not always align. In addition, the war economy that has developed in the country, with transnational organised crime and terrorism taking centre stage, further complicates the restoration of state authority over the whole territory.

Problematic internationalisation of the conflict

The internationalisation of the Libyan conflict is well documented and poses a serious threat to its resolution. This is demonstrated not only by the military and/or

armed support Libyan belligerents receive from their various allies, but also from whom they seek services.

A good example is the existence in Libya of what Djaziri qualifies as two de facto central banks, with Sadek El Kebir the bank's governor in Tripoli and his counterpart Mohamed Al-Shukri in Benghazi. Tripoli's bank notes are printed in the United Kingdom and Benghazi's in Russia.

The vested interests of external actors in the Libyan status quo are an obvious issue when those same actors take part in the international forums meant to resolve the crisis. Similarly, the multiplicity of platforms aiming to broker peace in Libya has fragmented the peace process through competing initiatives.

The contradictory – if not irreconcilable – interests of external actors add to the country's internal divisions, to the detriment of peace, stability and prosperity for the Libyan people.

Citizens have had enough of long-running blackouts, the rising cost of living and a hard currency shortage in a substantially cash-based economy

Even discussions at the UN, and its resolutions, are interfered with, given these conflicts of interest. This is why the African Union (AU) has been striving for a little over a year, without much success, to take the lead in the political process in Libya.

The recent Bouznika talks under Moroccan stewardship, although beneficial in many respects, should be part of or followed by a more global African initiative. Such an initiative should put an end to the many parallel peace processes on Libya in order to minimise the resultant fragmentation.

At the same time, the AU should only get involved if it is with the consent of the Libyan parties, which will also have to free themselves from external influences that do not act in the best interests of Libyans. From this perspective, collaboration between the AU and the UN on the Libyan dossier is crucial.

Ultimately, it will be up to Libyans themselves to overcome their grievances in order to rebuild their country and put an end to years of suffering.

What causes Africa's coups?

The near unanimous condemnation of the mutiny in Mali followed by the forced resignation of president Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta questions the consensus around unconstitutional changes of government in Africa.

In a rare alignment, various international peace and security actors condemned Mali's 18 August coup d'état. They also called for a return to constitutional order, despite Keïta's resignation and his dissolution of Parliament and government. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) went even further with targeted sanctions to coerce the coup plotters out of power.

This new appetite for sanctions from African organisations seems surprising, given the AU's tendency to criticise international sanctions against African states. Why has unconstitutional change of government become the red line of African statutory norms on democracy and governance?

Defining unconstitutional changes of government

The Lomé Declaration of 2000 and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance of 2007 both define aspects of unconstitutional change of government. These include: a military coup against a democratically elected government; mercenary intervention to replace a democratically elected government; replacing a democratically elected government by dissident armed groups and rebel movements; or refusal of an outgoing government to relinquish power following defeat in free, fair and regular elections.

The systematic mention of 'democratically elected government' illustrates both the context and spirit behind the Lomé Declaration. At a time when democratic constitutionalism was new in Africa, the aim was to protect the authority of civilian political institutions from the 'authoritarianism' of military interventions.

Since 2000, the citizen debate on democracy and governance in Africa has evolved. Priorities have shifted to the quality of electoral processes, the value of term limits, but also legitimacy, performance and accountability in political and economic governance. Social discontent, largely expressed through protest, has

been met with varying degrees of suppression, co-option and consolidation of the status quo.

On key governance issues, regional organisations have generally remained silent, despite the development of an African Governance Architecture (AGA) in 2011. With only 17 countries having signed and six ratifying the 2014 African Charter on the values and principles of decentralisation, local governance and local development, only ink-service is paid to core values like responsiveness, transparency, accountability and civic responsibility.

Deficiencies of governance

In 2014, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) noted that unconstitutional changes of government originated from 'deficiencies in governance. Greed, selfishness, mismanagement of diversity, failure to seize opportunities, marginalisation, human rights violations, unwillingness to accept electoral defeat, manipulation of constitutions and their revision through unconstitutional means to serve narrow interests, and corruption are all major contributors to unconstitutional changes of Governments and popular uprisings.'

The focus on unconstitutional changes of government reflects simplistic approaches to governance crises

The council's call for 'a zero tolerance for government policies and actions that may lead to a resort to unconstitutional means to overthrow oppressive systems' has not changed the dominant norms and actions. Despite the clarity provided by the PSC, in practice the AU and regional organisations have reduced democracy to the holding of elections and selective respect for term limits.

Meanwhile the quality of electoral processes is a recurrent trigger point, as was the case with Mali's

delayed and allegedly rigged March 2020 parliamentary elections. On elections, the AU and regional organisations routinely resort to observer missions. Their conclusions rarely challenge official results, even though emboldened civil society and judiciaries identify rigging. Recent elections in Kenya and Malawi are reminders.

On governance monitoring, the relevance of the AU's African Peer Review Mechanism can legitimately be questioned. Despite being around for two decades, its impact on the evolution of governance is hardly visible.

Against this backdrop, the concept of unconstitutional change of government has become AGA's main focus, while all the other dimensions of legitimate and responsive governance have been systematically scuttled by member states. In places like Mali, prioritising a symptom – i.e. the coup – over addressing root causes such as dubious legitimacy and corruption, makes the AU and ECOWAS's response look like a protection of incumbency. Both organisations have been silent about government inertia on inequality, the rule of law and fair electoral governance. The African and international approach seems to privilege the 'legality' over the legitimacy of sitting heads of state. This approach systematically puts intergovernmental organisations at odds with those countries' citizens.

Complex challenges

Africa's peace, security and governance norms and instruments will increasingly be tested by complex challenges. Reports from early warning systems and civil society organisations often correctly predict governance failures. Without political commitment to conflict prevention, the AU and regional organisations will increasingly react rather than pre-empt crises. It then becomes politically expedient to condemn a coup rather than take bold political steps to address the causes of social discontent.

The focus on unconstitutional changes of government reflects simplistic approaches to governance crises. Urgent calls by international parties for elections to restore constitutional order are questionable – particularly when constitutions or voting systems could be part of the problem.

Mali's recent history shows that expediting the electoral timetable can reproduce weak governments. Such solutions favour existing political elites, who are often complicit in nurturing the crisis of confidence. Hasty elections often hamper negotiations that stand a better chance of reflecting a country's socio-political dynamics. The political crisis in Mali is an opportunity to review African conflict prevention instruments, particularly regarding governance issues. Instead of focusing on elections and unconstitutional changes of government, other dimensions such as mediated dialogue and inclusive crisis management should be given greater attention.

In the absence of a more holistic concept of democratic governance, banning unconstitutional changes of government risks being misconstrued as a bonus for sitting presidents who want to stay in power. The challenge for the AU and regional organisations is to build bridges with civil society and develop effective capacity to prevent political crises.

18 August
2020

COUP D'ÉTAT IN MALI

Ethiopia can learn from its neighbours about national dialogue

The optimism initially generated by Ethiopia's much-praised political transition that started in 2018 has waned. Rivalry has grown between the federal government and some regional states, and political unrest and other forms of violence have become a recurring problem. National dialogue is increasingly seen as an option to redress deep-seated political and security problems.

Ethiopia's violence and instability have their roots in long-standing state-building deficits. These primarily include divergent interpretations of the country's political history, a lack of social cohesion, and an absence of national consensus on major state symbols and institutions.

A recent report by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) compares national dialogues in Kenya (2008), Sudan (2014–16) and South Sudan (2017–2020), with the aim of drawing lessons to support such a process in Ethiopia. The need for national dialogue in Ethiopia is now urgent, both to prevent crises and to help make long-term changes. Should the country opt for talks, the Horn of Africa could offer critical lessons.

Lessons from the region

Experiences from the region included the importance of wide consultation in initiating the dialogue, creating common understanding among key stakeholders on expected outcomes, and clearly defining objectives of the process.

National dialogue can work if it includes key political actors, armed groups and civil society groups

Depending on the political context, government, opposition groups or civil society organisations may initiate a national dialogue process. In Sudan and South Sudan, the talks were started by the incumbent presidents, without much participation by some major opposition and armed groups. This proved to be a weakness, undermining the dialogues' credibility in the preparation phase, and later hampering the implementation of recommendations.

Wide consultations are essential for defining achievable goals. Failing to do so results in an unrealistic dialogue agenda, and proposals that are hard to implement, as the Sudan national dialogue showed. In contrast, the aims of the Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation (KNDR) were specific and limited, so the outcomes were manageable.

Inclusivity and the participation of a wide range of stakeholders during negotiations are crucial to accommodating divergent interests and needs.

Kenya

Sudan

South Sudan

HOLD LESSONS
FOR ETHIOPIA

Despite including many participants, Sudan and South Sudan's dialogues didn't adequately involve key opposition political parties and armed groups. The groups were either excluded from the talks intentionally, or boycotted the processes due to dissatisfaction regarding government's role.

Participation in the KNDR was limited to those who engaged in Kenya's post-2007 election violence namely key political actors, the government and opposition. The process largely excluded other interest groups such as religious and business communities, and civil society organisations.

The transformative potential of dialogue

Despite their contrasting outcomes, all three cases show that national dialogue can fulfil its transformative potential if it includes key stakeholders – mainly political actors, armed groups and civil society groups. This wide representation enhances the legitimacy of the process.

Having credible conveners also enhances the legitimacy of national talks. Consultation methods, vetting, selection and appointment of the organisers are essential to the integrity of both the process and its outcomes.

Sudan and South Sudan's dialogue conveners were appointed by those countries' presidents, with limited or no consultation with opposition parties and armed groups. In Kenya's case, the organisers were the African Union Panel of Eminent African Personalities, led by former United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan. This helped largely insulate the KNDR from accusations of partiality. It did however raise questions on the principle of local ownership.

Transparency and public engagement are also central to the national dialogue process, and can be achieved through public consultations, regular outreach and media coverage. Kenya, Sudan and South Sudan all had their own limitations in this regard. South Sudan's bottom-up process allowed for extensive public engagement, and debates were aired widely in the media. But local and international media were only allowed to cover the dialogue's opening and closing ceremonies.

In Sudan, debates took place only in the conference room used for the talks. Media coverage was inadequate and the government introduced repressive measures such as arresting some key opposition figures. The dialogues in Kenya were centred on political elites, and public participation was limited.

Establishing structured links between national dialogue and other political processes is another vital measure, which helps avoid a competitive environment. National dialogue is just one mechanism to tackle political crises and violent conflicts, and is often preceded or accompanied by other steps. Sudan and South Sudan's national dialogues weren't sufficiently linked to other ongoing processes.

The last lesson from countries in the Horn is that implementation mechanisms for national dialogue outcomes must be clear from the start. The value of the entire process ultimately lies in whether its recommendations are acted upon.

Vetting and selection of the organisers are essential to the integrity of the process and its outcomes

Sudan's national talks resulted in 994 recommendations – none of which were implemented by the government. In contrast, the KNDR showed ways that dialogue outcomes could be implemented. Specialised institutions were established with the mandate of executing suggestions agreed to in negotiations, and room was created for civil society to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of implementation.

Sharp thinking is required on how to apply these lessons in Ethiopia, taking into account the need for careful planning, initiation and implementation of dialogue processes. Key stakeholders must be made aware of the importance of all aspects of the talks, and how each can enhance or undermine the process's credibility.

Ethiopia's political actors must choose between national dialogue and further instability. They should choose the former – and consider the many valuable lessons from the Horn.

PSC Report Interview: Finding a Libyan solution to the Libyan crisis

Morocco recently hosted talks between representatives of the Libyan Presidential Council and the Parliament of Tobruk that have been welcomed by the international community, including the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU). The *PSC Report* spoke to Nasser Bourita, the Moroccan minister of foreign affairs, about these talks and about the threat of terrorism in Africa.

In your view, what has been the most significant outcome of the talks?

In my view, the major breakthrough in the Bouznika talks was the willingness and commitment of the Libyans to sit down together and talk about ways to end the current political stalemate. This needs to be commended. It also explains the vast support these talks have received from the international community, including the UN and the AU.

An additional achievement was the format of these talks, as they were Libyan-led and Libyan-owned. They were held between representatives of institutions whose legitimacy derives from the 2015 Skhirat Agreement, which remains a valid Libyan framework that Libyan representatives can update, adapt and amend as they see fit.

Overall, the outcomes agreed upon in Bouznika are encouraging. They represent an important milestone that transforms a years-long impasse into a real momentum. A political track is definitely open, hopefully paving the way for a global political solution to the Libyan conflict.

The Bouznika talks were based on Article 15 of the Skhirat Agreement. In fact, both delegations, the Libyan High State Council and the Parliament of Tobruk, agreed, for the first time, on the dispatching and incumbents of several sovereign leadership positions. Moreover, they agreed, in the final joint communiqué, to continue this dialogue in order to complete the necessary measures that guarantee the implementation of this agreement.

As always, Morocco stood and will stand by the Libyan people to help them regain their stability, progress and well-being. Nevertheless, it is a Libyan–Libyan process. I want to stress that. Morocco did not put forward any proposals or even a recommendation, other than encouraging Libyan

brothers to sit, talk and be solution-oriented not process-oriented. At this point, only Libya matters.

In the context of external interference in the Libyan conflict, do you believe the dialogue between the Libyan parties can produce a lasting agreement?

I definitely believe that Libyan brothers can find a Libyan solution to the Libyan crisis.

The principled stand of His Majesty King Mohammed VI is that the solution will be Libyan or will not be! It will be political or will not be! It will be inclusive or will not be! And most and foremost, it should not and cannot be military.

It can work, should external interference in the Libyan crisis cease immediately, including especially the arms flow that is fuelling the conflict, playing with fire and gambling with the security of the entire Sahelo-Maghreb region.

The Skhirat Agreement and the outcome of the Bouznika talks have shown that the Libyans can overcome their differences

The Libyan conflict is not only a tragedy for Libya and the Maghreb, it is also a strategic nonsense and a no-win situation for all in the long run. It is high time for wisdom!

The Skhirat Agreement and the outcome of the Bouznika talks have shown, without a doubt, that the Libyans can overcome their differences if allowed to resolve their problems by themselves, without interference.

Morocco has full faith in the Libyans. We strongly support what they agree upon in order to reach a lasting and peaceful political solution to the crisis.

This will ultimately allow the Libyan people to live in peace, harmony and prosperity.

Despite the presence of international and regional forces, the security situation has not improved in the Sahel region. How can countries in the region and the AU engage constructively to find a solution to the global security crisis in the Sahel?

Morocco is monitoring very closely the disturbing trends in the Sahel. The countries and people of this region are near to us and close to our hearts.

The Sahel region is facing structural challenges and mounting complex and interconnected threats. Addressing the root causes of these structural challenges requires collective and resolute action.

His Majesty the King Mohammed VI has always called for

collective action to deal with terrorist groups, which find allies in separatist movements, human trafficking gangs as well as arms and drug dealers, because of their converging interests. These groups represent the most serious threat to regional and international security. (Throne Day speech, July 2014)

His Majesty's call is even more relevant today as terrorism, separatism and transnational organised crime have formed a toxic nexus, undermining the stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity of many countries in the region.

We need to enhance border and security cooperation and to cripple the various illicit flows that financially sustain this dangerous nexus in the Sahel

Nevertheless, despite the unquestionable interest of many international partners in supporting this region, the multiplicity of initiatives and, sometimes, their diverging agendas, complicate the dynamics on the ground. As a matter of fact, more than US\$4 billion in public aid are disbursed each year, yet little has been achieved when it comes to tackling the root causes of the crisis. The poverty rate remains at a 40% high, and youth unemployment is stuck between 40 and 50%. In the short run, the myriad of initiatives did not help Sahelian states that much at the end of the day. The recent developments in Mali are the perfect illustration of this state of affairs.

I see no alternative to closer and more resolute cooperation between Sahelo-Saharan countries, together and with relevant subregional organisations – I think of the G5 Sahel, CEN-SAD [Community of Sahel-Saharan States] and ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States], as well as the AU. We need to enhance border and security cooperation and to cripple the various illicit flows (drugs, arms, trafficking) that financially sustain this dangerous nexus in the Sahel.

We, in Morocco, believe that this should go hand in hand with a human security endeavour. That is why we continue to provide support to the development efforts of the brotherly countries of the Sahel region. His Majesty King Mohammed VI has undertaken many visits to the Sahel in the past two decades.

King
Mohammed VI

HAS VISITED THE SAHEL
MANY TIMES

Each visit has given rise to various socio-economic and human development projects and allowed for greater economic partnership. Our overarching goal is contributing to enhancing the living conditions of the population in the region, through economic growth, youth employment, countering the impact of climate change such as on food security, and helping on health issues – including in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

We have also been working with Sahel countries to strengthen security cooperation and establish a pioneer programme aimed at training imams and female preachers (*morchidates*).

Finally, yet importantly, the security crisis in the Sahel calls for an urgent and sustainable resolution of the Malian and Libyan crises. These crises have gone on for far too long, allowing for the continued deterioration of the situation on the ground.

What can be done about the current political crisis in Mali?

Mali is essential to the Sahel's stability. That is another reason why the timing of the current political crisis in Mali is particularly worrisome. It is no secret that terrorist groups are expanding their activities in the region, particularly in the tri-state border of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.

The 2015 peace agreement was a *minimum minimorum* consensus, reluctantly accepted by those who were to implement it. Everyone has claimed to support the agreement, yet no significant progress has been made in implementing it in the last five years. To put it plainly: none of the five pillars of the agreement has been implemented satisfactorily.

Wisdom is needed to make good use of the transitional period to strengthen social cohesion and undertake essential reforms

No doubt the Malian crisis is complex. The solution can only come through an endogenous initiative that benefits from the vigorous support of all components of the Malian nation.

Mali's brotherly people need to draw on the richness of their history and culture, from their longstanding tradition of living together peacefully and from their political experience.

Our wish is that Malian brothers can continue to talk and listen to each other. Wisdom is needed to make good use of the transitional period to strengthen social cohesion and undertake essential reforms. That will enable transparent and credible general elections, for instance. Let us not forget that the initial trigger of the political crisis was a contested legislative election.

All of us – neighbours, Africans and the international community – have to respect the choices of the Malian people. In this regard, Morocco stands alongside ECOWAS and encourages the ongoing talks aimed at finding an outcome that sets out the modalities for the transition period.

Mali
Niger
Burkina Faso

EXPERIENCING GROWING
TERROR THREATS

I strongly believe that Mali has the necessary experience and wisdom to overcome this crisis. I remember the national entente in March/April 2017, the meetings of the National Inclusive Dialogue in December 2019 and recently the national consultations at the beginning of September 2020. Mali is a great nation. Its people are a great people!

Terrorism and violent extremism have become one of the major peace and security threats to the entire African continent, from the Maghreb to Southern Africa. What concrete initiatives has Morocco undertaken to curb the threat of terrorism and violent extremism from which other African countries can learn?

The last two decades have regrettably witnessed a steady increase in terrorist violence, including in Africa. The continent went from one active terrorist group in the early 2000s (AQIM) to a dozen currently. Boko Haram alone has carried out more than 3 400 attacks since the start of the decade, killing 36 000. Deaths from terrorist attacks have quintupled in two years, going from around 900 in 2018 to more than 4 500 in 2019.

The Sahel region in particular has registered the most dramatic escalation of violence – up seven-fold since 2017 (from 147 attacks in 2017 to 999 by mid-2020). But no region is unaffected: from the Horn of Africa (more than 1 500 attacks from mid-2019 until mid-2020) to Southern Africa, and from the Lake Chad Basin (506 attacks in 2017 to 964 until mid-2020) to Central Africa and the Great Lakes region, nebulous terrorist organisations keep trying to establish a foothold. North Africa is the only region that has seen a continuing decline in terrorist violence since 2015 (from 900 attacks in 2015 to around 400 by mid-2020).

As for Morocco, the Casablanca terrorist attacks in 2003 were a sinister wake-up call, which prompted the Kingdom to put in place a sturdy and multifaceted counter-terrorism strategy.

First and foremost, the legal arsenal has been updated and reinforced.

Second, the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) has been put in place to address the socio-economic root causes of extremism, through fighting poverty and social inequalities with bold and unprecedented public investments.

Furthermore, structural reform of the religious sphere was launched in 2004, by His Majesty King Mohammed VI, aimed at immunising the religious sphere against extremist ideologies and advocating balance, moderation and tolerance.

In this context, the Mohammed VI Institute for Training Imams, Murchidines and Murchidates (male and female preachers) was established. It today trains hundreds of imams and preachers from Morocco and all over the world, including more than 2 000 African imams from Mali, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Tunisia, Senegal, Nigeria, Chad, The Gambia and Gabon.

The Mohammed VI Foundation for African Ulema was also launched in order to encourage Muslim ulema from African countries (I quote His Majesty King Mohammed VI) 'to make concerted efforts to fulfil their duty and turn a spotlight on the true image of the pristine Islamic faith as well as on its open-minded values, which are based on moderation, tolerance and coexistence'. (2016).

Morocco has been able to establish one of the most comprehensive and effective counter-terrorism strategies in Africa

Most recently, in 2017, Morocco adopted the 'Moussalaha' (reconciliation) programme for former violent extremist offenders. This programme is a process for de-radicalisation and reintegration, based on three main pillars: reconciliation with oneself, reconciliation with the religious text, and reconciliation with society.

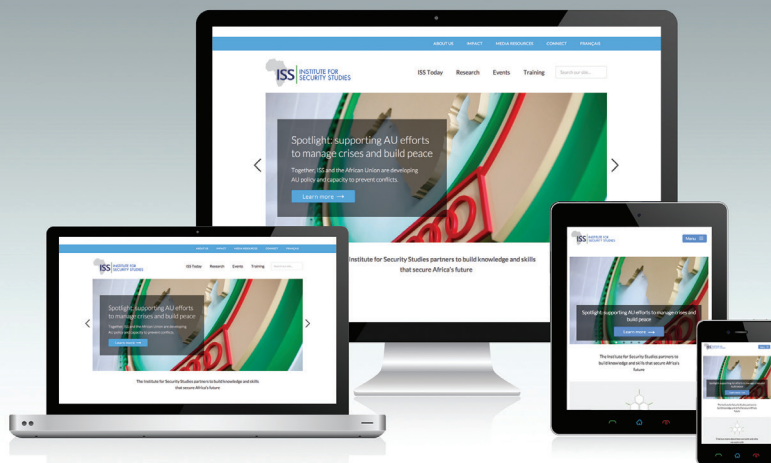
Less than two decades after the Casablanca attacks, Morocco has been able to establish one of the most comprehensive and effective counter-terrorism strategies in Africa. The Kingdom is also a respected actor on the international stage, as highlighted by Morocco's election as co-president of the Global Counter-terrorism Forum (GCTF) for three terms in a row.

All the lessons learned from these counter-terrorism programmes are being shared with brotherly African countries, at both bilateral and multilateral levels, in an inclusive and solidarity-based approach.

Finally, through triangular cooperation with international partners such as the US, Morocco contributes to the development of counter-terrorism capacities and cooperation in the Maghreb and Sahel regions.

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