



Peace & Security Council Report

The African Union can do better for the Sahel

The dangers of states of emergency to combat COVID-19

Current challenges should help in rethinking peace support in Africa

Can the AU help Africa's private sector survive COVID-19?

The PSC is adapting its working methods in difficult times – ambassador of Lesotho

Comment: towards a new post-COVID-19 world order?

The African Union can do better for the Sahel

The situation in the Sahel continues to preoccupy Africa. Despite the arrival of COVID-19, terrorist attacks have not abated in the region.

2019, in particular, saw a significant resurgence of attacks and violence in the region, especially in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, where the United Nations (UN) officially recorded more than 4 000 deaths.

It was this observation, and the lacklustre African support for the Sahel countries, that led Moussa Faki Mahamat, chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission, to tell African heads of state and government at the 33rd AU Summit in February 2020 that ‘the continent has not shown solidarity to its brothers and sisters in the Sahel’.

The first meetings on the subject at the level of the PSC did not garner the support of all its members

It was also at this meeting, after Mahamat’s speech, that African leaders asked the AU Commission to develop a framework on the possible deployment of a ‘force composed of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and 3 000 troops for six (6) months, in order to further degrade terrorist groups in the Sahel’.

Months later and after several meetings and discussions, what has become of this decision and what can it really add to the already complex reality of the Sahel?

Uncertainty over financing and troop contributions

Since February 2020 several meetings have been held involving the AU Commission and its Peace and Security Department, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the G5 Sahel Secretariat, in order to finalise the details of the deployment initially planned for June 2020.

However, the first meetings on the subject at the level of the Peace and Security Council did not garner the support of all its members, as they apparently disagreed on the modalities of implementing such a decision. The questions that arose related in particular to financing and troop contributions, which would affect the composition of the force.

In this sense, questions have been raised about the usefulness of the African Standby Force (ASF) and why it has never been mobilised, especially when it has supposedly been fully operational since 2016. Yet Africa continues to set up ad hoc military missions to respond to the very situations for which the ASF was designed.

Current PSC Chairperson

His Excellency Prof Mafa Sejanamane, ambassador of Lesotho 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

To date there has been no clear answer to these questions, particularly the thorny issue of funding. The AU force is meant to be deployed for six months precisely because there is no certainty over its sustainable funding.

At the same time, the AU Peace Fund, currently endowed with around US\$150 million, has been touted to prioritise the financing of less costly peace activities such as mediation and preventive diplomacy. Although the initial plan was for the fund to finance 25% of African-led peace operations, its current levels and unpredictable contributions mean it is not a viable financing option for any peace support operation at this point.

Operational questions also remain unanswered, notably with regard to the command of the force and its potential integration into existing systems.

Questions over timing and parallel initiatives

In addition, there is a much more general issue that has not been discussed publically, concerning the timing and necessity of deploying yet another force to the Sahel despite the challenges associated with existing deployments. In other words, what real contribution can this force make to the fight against terrorism in the Sahel, and is it the best step the AU can take to address the volatile situation?

There have been a plethora of military actors in the Sahel for several years, and various initiatives aimed at bringing peace and stability to the region. It is precisely this problematic overcrowding of the security space that the AU-proposed force will not resolve. Given the complexity of the threat in the Sahel, the AU's deployment could certainly contribute in some ways, but is that the best solution to the increasingly murky situation?

The multiplication of ad hoc reactions is a waste of resources that the continent cannot afford

There are essentially two types of forces present in the Sahel at the moment, namely multilateral and individual ones, although some states operate at both levels.

The multilateral forces include the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

(MINUSMA), the MNJTF and the G5 Sahel force. Then there is the French Operation Barkhane, which numbers approximately 5 100 soldiers, as well as United States (US), German, Belgian, British and Italian soldiers, both within MINUSMA and in the framework of bilateral agreements with countries of the Sahel (where some of these countries also have military bases).

In January 2020 French President Emmanuel Macron summoned regional heads of state to discuss the situation in the Sahel and the deployment of French forces in the region. The summons followed a surge of criticism regarding the ineffectiveness of French operations, particularly given the observed increase in attacks in the region.

The meeting in Pau, France, between Macron and leaders of the Sahel resulted in the reaffirmation of their cooperation, the announcement of renewed support from France and an additional 200 French soldiers in the Sahel. Another operation, Takouba, would support Barkhane and other ongoing military operations.

The coordination role of the AU

In a nutshell, if the AU wants to get fully involved and be genuinely useful in the Sahel, it should work to clean up the Sahelian quagmire by bringing order to the myriad initiatives, else the current deployment might help the situation only marginally, if at all.

Those close to decision-making circles on the ground believe that this should entail careful reflection and a clear plan that would require, among others, the support of the countries of the Sahel, key extra-regional actors and the regional bodies concerned.

In addition, the possible deployment of 3 000 AU troops reinforces the logic of a military solution, which has hitherto revealed its limitations. It is, therefore, elsewhere that the AU should orient and situate its contribution towards finding solutions to the Sahel's problems.

Finally, the AU must also make use of the peace and security architecture that it has worked hard to put in place, notably the ASF when it comes to mobilising soldiers and carrying out non-combat activities. The multiplication of ad hoc reactions makes efforts to set up long-term mechanisms obsolete and is a waste of resources that the continent cannot afford.

The dangers of states of emergency to combat COVID-19 in Africa

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) has, on several occasions since late March 2020, appealed to African countries to uphold human rights in their responses to COVID-19.

The ACHPR wrote to President Cyril Ramaphosa, chairperson of the African Union (AU), to reiterate its concern about ensuring 'effective and human rights-based responses to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa'.

It also called on Tanzania and South Africa, on an individual basis, to respect human rights, including safeguarding public health in Dar es Salaam. This followed the declaration of states of emergency or similar legal provisions such as states of disaster in several countries and the enforcement of various measures to contain the spread of COVID-19.

The implementation of these measures has threatened people's rights, complicated existing challenges and could revive or exacerbate social and political tensions, against the backdrop of a continent-wide economic downturn.

The AU and its PSC should heed the call made by its own organ, the ACHPR and other rights groups

The handling of COVID-19 patients has also raised serious human rights concerns. Many have complained about being placed in isolation centres or taken to health facilities where they have received inadequate medical attention and poor nutrition, and have been treated in an inhumane or degrading fashion.

Healthcare workers themselves, at the frontline of the fight, have also complained about not getting the appropriate equipment to do their jobs. When they wanted to protest, the state of emergency regime prevented them from doing so.

The AU and its PSC should heed the call made by its own organ, the ACHPR and other rights groups. Member states must reaffirm their commitment to preserving the rule of law in order to ensure social and political stability. With the ACHPR, the AU and the PSC must be active

and vigilant so as not to allow a receding of rights that will be detrimental to the continent's peace and stability.

States of emergency in Africa: procedural issues

In the past two months, several African countries have declared states of emergency or national disaster to enable them to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. This was the case, for instance, for nearly all countries in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), including Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, which were already under this legal regime to repel other security threats, particularly terrorism.

Across the continent, many countries have implemented measures that restrict the mobility of people, banned public gatherings, and rolled out their security forces to oversee the implementation of these measures. The extended powers given to security forces in some countries go beyond restricting the movement of people to include the authorisation to search people's homes without a warrant.

In most cases in Africa, only a state of emergency or national disaster gives governments, in this case the executive branch, immediate and extended powers to make such decisions legal and enforceable. Depending on the country, declaring a state of emergency or of national disaster follows distinct processes and confers different powers on the executive. In most cases, a state of emergency gives more extensive powers to the executive and, as a consequence, drastically reduces civil liberties.

The involvement and control of other branches of government is typically limited at first and then eventually becomes necessary to extend the state of emergency, for instance.

Court challenges

In some countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Malawi, these measures were challenged in court. In the first case, before the state of emergency was declared on 24 March and a lockdown of

parts of the capital city–province Kinshasa was imposed, President Felix Tshisekedi had announced, on 18 March, measures to restrict the movement of people, including banning public gatherings, closing schools, restricting travel and closing public establishments such as bars and restaurants.

Many believed that instituting those measures before declaring the state of emergency was unconstitutional. Some also argued that Tshisekedi was supposed to consult with and get approval from both Parliament and the Senate before declaring the state of emergency. The Constitutional Court, however, ruled that Tshisekedi's state of emergency declaration was in fact based on the law.

What has transpired in the DRC is also linked to the political climate before the outbreak of COVID-19, whereby Tshisekedi has been in a fragile and at times tumultuous political arrangement with former president Joseph Kabila's *Front Commun pour le Congo* (FCC), which holds a majority in Parliament and the Senate.

Courts in Malawi cancel the government's plans

In Malawi, President Peter Mutharika declared a state of national disaster, seeking to impose a 21-day nationwide lockdown that was to begin on 18 April. Human rights groups brought the matter before the country's high court, claiming that the president had failed to outline measures to provide for the most vulnerable of the population. In response, the court temporarily suspended Mutharika's decision and later confirmed it, saying that it was a matter for the Constitutional Court.

The extended powers given to security forces in some countries go beyond restricting the movement of people

The challenge put forth by rights groups suggests that health security does not necessarily supersede food security, or that the two are not mutually exclusive. If a government is to declare a state of national disaster to preserve the health of the population, it has to ensure that it does not endanger their food security at the same time. Many have also argued that if a lockdown leads to more people dying of starvation than of COVID-19, the restrictions placed on people's movement become self-defeating.

What both situations show, albeit in different ways, is that procedures do matter. They ensure the soundness of the process, protect against potentially arbitrary decisions, contribute to the stability and solidity of state institutions, safeguard checks and balances, and provide for accountability mechanisms. They also show that the political context matters. Both Tshisekedi and Mutharika face challenges to their legitimacy. This is also the case in countries such as Togo and Guinea, where states of emergency were declared with both countries going to elections amid crackdowns on the opposition and civil society.

States of emergency in Africa and abuse of power

Due to the abuses seen during the COVID-19 lockdowns around the world, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet recently warned that 'the public health emergency risks becoming a human rights disaster'. There has been a tendency towards what can be described as the misuse of the state of emergency for repressive or purely political purposes. 'But emergency powers should not be used as a weapon to quash dissent, control the population and even perpetuate their time in power. Exceptional measures should be used to cope with the pandemic, nothing more, nothing less,' says Bachelet. The fear is that the pandemic will persist over time and that this decline in human rights will continue even beyond this crisis.

In fact, as a state of emergency cannot be a permanent regime, some countries are in the process of passing or have passed laws that allow the maintenance of the restrictions imposed in the fight against COVID-19. This legalises, de facto, a kind of 'regime of exceptions', which in many cases can hardly pass constitutional muster. In addition, the current environment makes it even more difficult for civil society and human rights defenders to oppose this shift.

What is at stake is not a philosophical or ideological debate about democracy or human rights, but rather the very lives of the people for whom these measures are being taken. Managing this pandemic requires trust, particularly between governments and citizens. Transparency and accountability are two important ingredients to build and maintain this trust. A show of force and rolling back citizens' rights and civil liberties will not do.

COVID-19 should help in rethinking peace support in Africa

Peace support operations (PSOs) across Africa are adapting their responses to the new reality of COVID-19. Since the outbreak, PSOs have provided critical support in the fight against the pandemic in situations where protracted conflict has destroyed the health infrastructure of many African countries.

Both the contribution of PSOs in responding to the risk posed by COVID-19 and the effect of the pandemic on operations show that the UN Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) agenda – aimed at improving the impact and performance of PSOs – has to take disease outbreaks such as COVID-19 into consideration.

Africa, as host to the highest number of PSOs in the world and the biggest contributor of troops and police, should prioritise this issue. The PSC, in collaboration with African non-permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), should emphasise the need to expand the ‘protection of civilians’ mandate. This mandate has so far been focused on conventional security threats, but should take into account new and unforeseen threats such as epidemics or pandemics.

The African Standby Force (ASF) should adopt a similar framework. While a humanitarian response is in the purview of the ASF, its rapid deployment capabilities should also enable regional forces to respond swiftly to health-related crises. Airlifting of medical staff and equipment to respond to COVID-19 in West and Central Africa has already started with ASF achieving full operational capacity in May 2020. Institutionalising such support will however require a new PSO doctrine on disaster management, building on existing guidelines for civil-military relations.

Adapting to a new reality

PSOs had medical infrastructure in place before the outbreak of COVID-19 that helped in rapidly adapting measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic in their areas of deployment and among mission personnel.

The medical guidance of PSOs was also expanded to include pandemic preparedness and medical intervention, including testing, isolation and evacuation if the need arises.

According to Atul Khare, Under-Secretary General for Operational Support at the UN, personal protective equipment (PPE) and supplies for treatment centres have

been dispatched to all PSOs. In Africa, Mali, Somalia and Kenya have become stations for the further distribution of stocks, including testing equipment, while Egypt, Uganda and Kenya have agreed to receive COVID-19 patients evacuated from PSOs.

The role of PSOs in raising awareness

PSOs are playing an important role in supporting national efforts to fight the spread of the virus. Working in collaboration with governments, PSOs are disseminating information and raising awareness about the pandemic.

Most missions have established radio stations, such as Mikado FM in Mali, Radio Miraya in South Sudan, Radio Okapi in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Guira FM in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Radio Yalla Nebni in Darfur. They have wide-reaching transmission, including across territories that might be controlled by militants. Radio programmes also provide tailored content to audiences such as children and those that require psychosocial support.

Airlifting of medical staff and equipment to respond to COVID-19 in West and Central Africa has already started

Sensitisation among communities also helps to counter misinformation and deep-seated mistrust of the government and healthcare professionals. Misinformation during a health crisis has at times resulted in attacks on healthcare providers and hospitals, as seen during Ebola outbreaks in the DRC.

A number of PSOs are also distributing PPE and sanitary supplies to communities, and are involved in the transportation of medical equipment to areas that are remote and difficult to access.

In addition, PSOs are supporting the most disenfranchised in accessing food and basic provisions

that have become more difficult to acquire in some areas owing to limitations on movement and local transportation during the pandemic.

While some armed groups in Darfur, the CAR and South Sudan have heeded the call by UN Secretary-General António Guterres for a global ceasefire during the pandemic, it is too early to gauge to what extent violence has reduced as a result. Most PSOs continue to operate regardless of the levels of violence and conflict, highlighting the importance of the protection PSOs provide to civilians during the pandemic.

Working in collaboration with governments, PSOs are disseminating information and raising awareness about the pandemic

In addition to COVID-19, PSOs are also responding to the outbreak of other diseases, such as Ebola, cholera and measles in the DRC, and tuberculosis, malaria, and measles in the CAR.

Need for social distancing

The spread of COVID-19 among PSOs has so far been very low. Nonetheless, PSOs have been affected by measures taken to curb the spread of the virus.

The need for social distancing has meant that PSOs can only undertake critical functions within their mandate. Especially, full implementation of the mandate of offensive operations, such as that of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the UN Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the UN Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), has been hindered. Despite continued attacks on AMISOM and MINUSMA contingents by terrorist groups, the missions cannot undertaking full-scale combat operations.

Civil–military relations and a number of development activities that require direct contact with local populations have also been suspended. An exception was legislative elections in Mali in March and April 2020, supported by MINUSMA as part of its mandate. The election took place amid fears of the spread of COVID-19 and instability following the kidnapping of main opposition leader Soumaila Cisse by gunmen.

Support to peace processes and state institutions has also been scaled back since the outbreak of COVID-19. The Sudan peace process, supported by the AU–UN Mission Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), has been suspended. In the CAR, the momentum for implementation of the peace deal, signed by the government and militants in 2019 and of which the UN Mission in the CAR (MINUSCA) was a guarantor, is stalling.

PSOs in Mali, the DRC and South Sudan have to contend with growing anti-foreigner sentiments and a backlash caused by misinformation about the pandemic. This could disrupt crucial operations, and the supply of aid and healthcare provisions.



UN RADIO STATIONS
CREATE AWARENESS
ABOUT COVID-19

The impact of the pandemic on global freight service and sea carriers has also affected the timely supply of goods to PSOs. While many countries are allowing supplies to pass through their closed borders, there is an inevitable delay.

Rotation and mandate renewals impacted by COVID-19

Meanwhile, the pandemic has also affected the rotation, deployment and repatriation of troops and police, which the UN secretary-general has suspended until the end of June 2020. Although police- and troop-contributing countries have committed to deploying their contingents beyond their term limits, the suspension might affect the capacity of some missions in instances where planned reinforcement and replacement of troops has been suspended.

The mandate of the majority of PSOs in Africa will end in 2020. These include MONUSCO in the DRC, UNAMID in Darfur, MINUSMA in Mali, and the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara.

So far it has been possible to renew mandates, as witnessed from the six month extension granted to the UN Interim Security Force for Abeyi by the UNSC and the one year extension of AMISOM's mandate by the PSC in May through video conferencing. However, virtual meetings of the UNSC and PSC do not allow the same level of deliberation and debate in reviewing the performance of PSOs in meeting their mandates. Independent field assessments to evaluate PSOs and provide policymakers with accurate information for decision-making will also not be possible during the pandemic. However, rigorous review of PSOs is more crucial in 2020 than ever, since the ability of most missions to fully meet their mandates has been hindered by COVID-19.

Delays in the drawdown of both AMISOM and UNAMID are also probable during the pandemic. Negotiations expected to bring about comprehensive peace in Sudan, and upon which UNAMID's drawdown is partially dependent, have been halted.

AMISOM's drawdown, on the other hand, is directly linked to the capacity of Somali security forces to control and secure territories handed over by AMISOM. It is therefore unlikely to take place when the fight against COVID-19 has diverted some of their capacity to respond to al-Shabaab.

Severe funding constraints pose another challenge PSOs will continue to face during and in the aftermath of the pandemic. Currently, the UN is appealing to all countries to pay their contributions on time in order to ease the burden of financing PSOs from police- and troop-contributing countries that are yet to be reimbursed for their personnel and equipment.

Nevertheless, fear of an imminent economic crisis may cause contributing countries to prioritise rebuilding their economies devastated by COVID-19. Availability of funding could become the biggest challenge in deploying PSOs, and especially the ASF, in a health crisis. Rethinking the mandates and responsibilities of PSO's in this context will thus become crucial.

1 year

RENEWAL OF AMISOM'S
MANDATE THROUGH
VIDEO CONFERENCING

Can the AU help Africa's private sector survive COVID-19?

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to rage unabated, Africa seems set for a major economic crisis owing to the restrictive measures to combat COVID-19, the fall in commodity prices, the disruption in global supply chains, and restrictions on international travel.

The AU has drawn up a range of scenarios on the impact of COVID-19 on African economies. While key sectors (oil and gas, tourism, transport) are already severely affected, the slowdown in the informal sector will compound unemployment rates. With the informal sector the largest source of employment for many on the continent, the socio-economic impact of this is likely to be devastating.

SMEs the hardest hit

While some large companies operating in sectors on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response (mostly telecommunications, agribusiness, personal hygiene and pharmaceuticals) are reaping the benefits, most small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are heavily impacted by this crisis. The slowdown, if not total interruption, of operations, cash flow issues and challenges in meeting overheads are among the major challenges. The consequences for SMEs could range from salary cuts and retrenchments to bankruptcy.

Governments should focus on creating an ecosystem of strategic information that could help SMEs share experience

The appointment by the AU chairperson, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, of five special envoys to mobilise international financial support for Africa's efforts in fighting the effects of COVID-19 indicates how the anticipated economic crisis is likely to affect the continent's recent growth gains.

This appointment was followed by the announcement by some of Africa's public creditors (G20) of a moratorium on Africa's debt. Though controversial, this is a laudable effort that will presumably translate into increased capacity to manage the health crisis.

A sizable portion of the money made available in this manner should be invested in saving private businesses from bankruptcy. This is a particularly daunting challenge

on a continent where access to credit remains a privilege, tax systems are tenuous and transparency challenges are rife.

In several African countries SMEs have shown great resilience in confronting the existential challenges the pandemic presents. However, helping them to survive the crisis should not be restricted to cash transfers. Given how difficult it will be to resuscitate collapsed SMEs, governments and regional organisations should rather focus on creating an ecosystem of strategic information that could help SMEs share experience and good practices.

Impact on peace and security

Whether the PSC, as well as the UN Security Council, declares the COVID-19 crisis an international peace and security issue or not, it seems likely that its toll on the private sector will have consequences for peace and security.

Protecting their capacity to survive this crisis should be a priority for the AU Commission's Economic Affairs and Trade and Industry departments, as well as for its Peace and Security Department.

The stabilising role played by private businesses in peaceful times has been widely documented. By creating value and employment opportunities they help to keep citizens out of the reach of entrepreneurs of violence. Their role as peace agents in times of war, during major international crises and when building peace, is less known.

Private businesses – small, medium and large – are the backbone of post-conflict African economies. Very few peacebuilding initiatives would be possible without the contribution of private companies, including in the informal sector. Demobilised former combatants, for example, would hardly earn a living if private companies were not ready to take risks.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the continent, major companies in some African countries, as well as wealthy

captains of industry, offered their support to governments in their fight against the spread of the virus. Some of the wealthiest families in South Africa, for example, opted to create funds dedicated to helping SMEs financially affected by the crisis. While big companies can afford to provide some assistance to governments, SMEs are in dire need of support.

The AU's role in mobilising support

The AU can play a major role in mobilising support for private businesses in order to avoid social crises that could affect countries' stability. While state-owned enterprises are almost certain to receive government bailouts, the AU Commission, in collaboration with the African Development Bank and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, should focus on SMEs.

This support should not be limited to an emergency plan related to the fight against COVID-19. It should be part of a systematic, long-term plan that will see the AU involve African private enterprises more in matters pertaining to peace and security.

The stabilising role played by private businesses in peaceful times has been widely documented

Building on existing initiatives involving elders (Panel of the Wise), women (FemWise) and the youth (Youth for Peace), the AU Commission could take advantage of the COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath to develop a continental framework that increases the peace dividend of private businesses. Their conflict prevention and peacebuilding potential has remained largely untapped in Africa, and the AU Commission has the legitimacy to give them a platform where they can voice their concerns at the continental level.

There are potentially many obstacles to achieving this. Some of these relate to internal dynamics and siloed thinking at the various AU Commission departments. This would present the AU departments of Peace and Security, Trade and Industry, and Economic Affairs with a unique opportunity to cross-pollinate their skills and networks in favour of peace; a cross-cutting goal enshrined in Agenda 2063. Ideally, such an initiative should be housed in the Office of the Chairperson.

Another issue is the structure of SMEs in Africa. With the notable exception of Northern Africa and South Africa, most private businesses on the continent operate informally, employing a substantial part of the labour force. Many are either personal or family businesses with accounting practices that do not reflect recognised standards of transparency. This often makes it difficult for governments to boost the capacity of informal businesses.

Despite these obstacles the AU Commission would be well advised to enter into a strategic partnership with the private sector. The COVID-19 crisis presents a historic opportunity that should also involve regional economic communities. To be sustainable, this initiative should be innovative enough to include representatives of the informal sector.

Peace and Security
Trade and Industry
Economic Affairs

AU DEPARTMENTS THAT
COULD ASSIST SMEs

PSC interview: The PSC is adapting its working methods in difficult times

Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19 restrictions, the PSC has attempted to continue with its work virtually. The *PSC Report* spoke to Prof Mafa Sejanamane, Lesotho's ambassador to the AU and chairperson of the PSC for May 2020, about the country's aims and priorities for this month.

What has been the impact of COVID-19 on the AU's theme of the year and its Roadmap to Silencing the Guns?

COVID-19 is not only the biggest health challenge in a century, but also presents the biggest social, economic and security dilemma the world has seen. All the plans which the AU and the rest of the world had for 2020 have effectively been shelved.

As you'll recall, as part of the strategy of silencing the guns, an extraordinary summit had been planned in South Africa at the end of May 2020. The summit was meant to bring together all the plans and to consolidate the efforts by African countries to banish and/or reduce wars and other conflicts. This is no more. Terrorists in the Sahel, northern Mozambique and southern Tanzania, among other areas, continue to destabilise the continent. COVID-19 has brought about major disruptions in the planning and execution of plans to fight terrorism and other conflicts in Africa.

How will the AU and PSC continue to effectively respond to peace and security threats during the pandemic?

As demonstrated in April 2020 under the leadership of Kenya, the PSC has been hobbled but not disabled. The council has continued to lead in a number of initiatives, including dealing with the renewal of the mandate of the G5 Sahel. It has also been able to consider the implications of COVID-19 on peacekeeping, etc. We will continue to meet virtually and make the necessary decisions. In emergencies, extraordinary measures can be taken, like using the airlift capacities of member states to move troops if the situation arises.

Terrorists have not so far shown that they will exercise restraint and prudence during this period. On the contrary, they are trying to take an opportunistic advantage. But the PSC will remain alert throughout this period.

In what way has the PSC adapted its working methods and priorities to mitigate the challenges posed by the pandemic?

This has partly been responded to above. Let me emphasise that the PSC has adapted by dealing with the challenges virtually and online. It's not as efficient because of the network capacity and limited debate period, but it has served us well so far. It is clear that this is a difficult time, but all institutions are beginning to adjust and adapt their working methods.

Will other major AU initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area, the AU reform agenda and issues related to sustainable financing of the AU be postponed until the end of the pandemic?

This is a broader AU issue that requires others rather than the chair of the PSC for the month of May.

What is being done by the PSC to mitigate new threats to peace and security associated with COVID-19, such as human rights abuses during lockdowns, the worsening plight of refugees and the postponement of peace initiatives owing to travel restrictions?

The PSC is not oblivious to the challenges brought about by COVID-19 to vulnerable groups. This is why the question of the plight of refugees was the last item handled under the chairmanship of Kenya last week. Both the commissioner for political affairs and the commissioner for social affairs, together with the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, addressed those issues. Broadly speaking, it is clear that whatever responses we have to focus on in dealing with COVID-19 must be inclusive and within the broad framework of human rights. As we try to save lives and our civilisation, we must at the same time recognise that the rights of our people are protected. They must be included in all programmes, since leaving anyone out will ensure that the pandemic spreads. As long as one person is sick the rest will be infected.

Comment: towards a new post-COVID-19 world order?

As the world grapples with the COVID-19 pandemic, the reality of its aftermath cannot be overlooked. International relations experts agree that, just as 9/11 marked a turning point in global security relations, so the pandemic will be not just a health issue but also a major catalyst for new dynamics in the international system. The resulting shifts have the potential to redefine inter-state relations and global governance in ways that require Africa and the global South, in general, to reposition themselves.

Implications for Africa and the global South

For the global South, comprising largely developing countries and heavily dependent on the North, the disruptions caused by COVID-19 call for new ways of doing things. There is a strong possibility that developed countries will have to reduce development aid while addressing the economic consequences of the pandemic.

Even if development partners have committed themselves to maintaining their support for African countries, a divided focus can certainly be expected. This has direct implications for Africa's dependence on the developed world for aid in many key areas, including peace and security.

Africa will have to reconsider its current over-dependence on external support and rather commit to finding African solutions

As the world order will have to struggle with significant unknowns, Africa and countries in the global South will have to reposition themselves to deal with the new actors that will most likely fill the gap.

Regional solidarity among African states through existing multilateral institutions – particularly the AU and regional economic communities (RECs), which have played important roles in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic on the continent – will be key. Africa will have to reconsider its current over-dependence on external support and rather commit to its agenda to find African solutions to African problems.

Signs of a weakened international order

Before the outbreak of the pandemic, it was clear that the role of the United States (US) as a central pillar in global governance in a unipolar post-Cold War era was waning. Not only was the US projecting less leadership, but its absence in the mobilisation of multilateral responses was also evident.



COVID-19 WILL BE A
TURNING POINT IN
GLOBAL RELATIONS

This was compounded by the rise of Donald Trump and Trump-style populism in the global North and the resultant assault on global multilateral institutions, environmental governance structures and regional relations. Brexit, for instance, is not just a European crisis, but also a classic demonstration of fundamental challenges to multilateralism.

The injection of domestic populist nationalism into global diplomacy also worsened relations between China and the US, two of the world's major powers, with dire consequences for global economic stability. Apart from the US' receding role in global leadership under Trump, there has been clear contestation over its unipolar leadership through China's projection of both economic power and influence.

The rise in tension between the two countries has affected many areas of global relations, with major implications for the global South.

Regional solidarity among African states through existing multilateral institutions – particularly the AU and regional economic communities – will be key

The emergence of COVID-19 within this context and the inability of the global powers to take leadership in its management point to the eroding influence that these weaknesses have had on the contemporary global management of crises.

The way in which the pandemic has been handled is thus both a symptom of existing weaknesses in the international system and a major catalyst in the deterioration of those challenges in ways that will affect the nature of global inter-state relations going forward.

Power contestation between the US and China

With the pandemic worsening existing structural weaknesses in the international system, the post-COVID-19 global order is bound to undergo three major changes.

First, tensions between the US and China may go beyond trade wars. It is clear that COVID-19 has put both the US' and China's systems to the test and exposed their respective strengths and weaknesses.

While China has had an opportunity to recover and project strength in the handling of the pandemic, fault lines in the US' healthcare infrastructure, its handling of the pandemic and domestic political leadership have all exposed structural challenges in the American system. The implications of this for the two powers' contestation for influence and the associated mutual suspicions are bound to remain even after the pandemic is contained.

Control over the narrative of China's initial handling of the crisis is already a major point of disagreement between the two countries. The US' attack on the World Health Organization's (WHO) handling of the pandemic is clear evidence of this.

The US
China

TENSIONS COULD GO
BEYOND TRADE WARS

The timing of the US' suspension of funding support to the health body amid an existential threat to humankind is a dangerous assault not just on global health governance but also on multilateralism in general. Its most immediate impact is most likely going to be felt in the developing world, where the services of the WHO could be crucial in supporting health systems' recovery after the pandemic.

The continued rise of nationalism

The second expected change after COVID-19 is the continued rise of nationalism, resulting in inward-looking states. This is bound to emerge not just from a rise in mistrust among states but also from the realisation that there are dangers associated with over-reliance on China as the world's primary supply chain source for certain essential commodities.

Indications that the US aggressively outbid other countries to prevent them from accessing personal protection equipment (PPEs) in April, an occurrence that has become known as 'medical piracy', at a time every country needed such equipment, illustrates the major powers' self-seeking approach in the response to the pandemic.

It is likely that all states will have to pay more attention to internal economic recovery efforts and preparations to shield themselves from similar pandemics in future

As much as the absence of the US' leadership has affected the struggle to address the crisis, its increasing abdication of global leadership is likely to increase in a post-COVID-19 world. It is likely that all states will have to pay more attention to internal economic recovery efforts and preparations to shield themselves from similar pandemics in future.

In the US, in particular, Trump will be forced to focus on the economy and job creation, which will compound the challenges the country's leadership is facing across the world. The flaws that have marked the ongoing global response to the pandemic are a mere foretaste of the US' abdication of global leadership.

Finally, the global South will have to get used to the US' increasing absence from a post-COVID-19 global order, especially if Trump is re-elected. The lacuna that is likely to result from the decline of the US' influence will not be filled immediately. China's rise is projected through economic power, but it is difficult to establish whether it has what it takes to also provide political answers in the global South, as the US has done since the end of the Cold War.

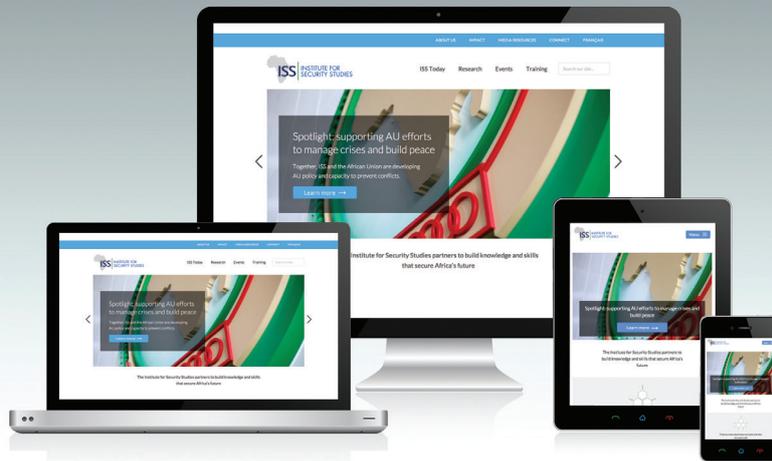
What is interesting, however, is the emergence of influential multinational entities and foundations such as the Jack Ma and the Bill and Melinda Gates foundations, which have played a major role in equipping African countries to manage the pandemic. It remains to be seen whether these can be harnessed widely in Africa's response to the challenges it faces.

WHO

CRUCIAL IN SUPPORTING
THE DEVELOPING WORLD

Visit our website for the latest analysis, insight and news

The Institute for Security Studies partners to build knowledge and skills that secure Africa's future



Step 1 Go to www.issafrica.org

Step 2 Go to bottom right of the ISS home page and provide your subscription details

About the PSC Report

The Peace and Security Council Report analyses developments and decisions at the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC). The monthly publication is the only one of its kind dedicated to providing current analysis of the PSC's work. It is written by a team of ISS analysts in Addis Ababa.

About the ISS

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) partners to build knowledge and skills that secure Africa's future. Our goal is to enhance human security as a means to achieve sustainable peace and prosperity. Using its networks and influence, the ISS provides timely and credible analysis, practical training and technical assistance to governments and civil society.

Contributors to this issue

Mohamed Diatta, ISS Addis Ababa researcher
Liesl Louw-Vaudran, ISS senior research consultant
Andrews Attah-Asamoah, ISS senior research fellow
Shewit Woldemichael, ISS Addis Ababa researcher
Paul-Simon Handy, ISS senior regional advisor

Contact

Liesl Louw-Vaudran

Consultant to the *PSC Report*
ISS Pretoria
Email: llouw@issafrica.org

Development partners



The publication of the PSC Report is made possible through support from the Government of the Netherlands, the Government of Denmark and the Hanns Seidel Foundation. The ISS is also grateful for the support of the following members of the ISS Partnership Forum: the Hanns Seidel Foundation, the European Union and the governments of Canada, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the USA.

© 2020, Institute for Security Studies

Copyright in the volume as a whole is vested in the Institute for Security Studies and the authors, and no part may be reproduced in whole or in part without the express permission, in writing, of both the authors and the publishers.

The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the ISS, its trustees, members of the Advisory Council or donors. Authors contribute to ISS publications in their personal capacity.

