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Key Developments in Global Affairs

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## CHAPTER 3

# Africa's sore spot: Regional conflicts across the Middle and the Horn

*An Jacobs*

Despite positive messages of democratisation and economic growth, sub-Saharan Africa remains afflicted by severe conflicts. The Middle and the Horn host the most widespread and intense of them. Resources and ethno-religious differences are often part of the equation, but the core problem rests with bad governance. Political elites use underlying frictions to fight regional wars, all too often fuelled by third-party resource grabs. Until regional dynamics are better understood and addressed through conflict management and trade harmonisation, Africa will continue to seriously suffer.



A soldier of the UN/African Union UNAMID peacekeeping force in Sudan, 11 January 2011



AFRICA HAS BEEN CLIMBING UP THE INTERNATIONAL POLICY AGENDA FOR SOME TIME NOW, BUT NOT FAST ENOUGH. Despite the newspaper headlines across the globe heralding a new era of democratisation and economic growth, a closer look at the regional dynamics on the continent paints a very different picture. No one can deny that sub-Saharan Africa has witnessed more elections over the course of the last three decades, but these have been short-term 'ballot box' exercises rather than structural democratic practices of good governance. Elections, invariably labelled 'free and fair', have been little more than a show of pretence to guarantee a next term for those in office. In Africa, corruption continues to rule.

The same holds for economic progress. Emerging markets – busy investing in African infrastructure and resources – consider those investments increasingly vital to guarantee their own growth. But the BRICs are not building an economically and politically more solid Africa. Foreign direct investment has increased – both in volume and in geographical spread – but as a result, volatile commodity prices are becoming increasingly difficult for Africa to manage. Equity deals seeking direct control of African resources has been the BRIC response, many of which have admittedly laid the foundations

for growth in telecommunications, business services, sales, and manufacturing sectors. But if Africa is to create meaningful wealth from its resources, then credible and appropriate government policies are urgently needed. Filling labour gaps, enhancing market growth, and providing a desirable investment infrastructure is not easy, and points to the core problem ahead: African resources are vast, the growth potential enormous, but neither can match the persistent political risk and regional instability sweeping across the continent.

Large parts of sub-Saharan Africa have indeed been almost unremittingly subject to conflicts, preventing an African 'take-off' anything close to what we have seen in Asia. What is worse, such conflicts have invariably grown regional tentacles, making any effective resolution to them increasingly difficult. Such a point might seem obvious, but regional thinking has not sunk in on a political level in Africa, nor with the international actors involved in conflict resolution. Until regional dynamics are better understood and better addressed, Africa is unlikely to make the kind of advancement that international headlines would have us believe. Regional problems require regional *and* international solutions if Africa is to progress.



The 'numbers' are revealing. About two-third of the world's fragile states are located in Africa, with the most deadly and most persistent conflict hub in Central and Eastern Africa. This region, stretching from Kinshasa to Djibouti and from Khartoum to Lubumbashi, hosts some of the major regional hotbeds of conflict below the Sahara. Large territories across the borders of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), (South) Sudan, Somalia, and adjoining countries have seen chronic regional instability as the day-to-day trend; without major remedial action, it will be the defining feature for decades to come.

In geopolitical terms, this region is closely watched across the globe to monitor political risk for resource extraction and foreign direct investment. The Middle and the Horn share a shaken recent history, and both face a bumpy road ahead. 2011 was critical, and the outlook for 2012 does not look much better. Turbulent Congolese presidential elections have attracted international headlines in November last year. Discontent with electoral practices and outcomes now continues to endanger stability in the DRC, and with Tshisekedi's supporters seemingly unwilling to accept Kabila's second term, post-electoral developments remain unsure at this stage. South Sudan

became the youngest country in the world in July 2011, and as is often the case with young age, there is a lot to learn. Independence has so far only brought more conflict in terms of demarcating borders and securing oil revenues. But internal issues have also cropped up; inter-ethnic conflict is widespread, as are battles between the brand-new government and local militias. The country currently faces violent uprisings across its territory, with the real risk of becoming a failed state less than a year after being born.

Elections in Somalia – planned for August 2012 – are another event to watch. Western support for the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Mogadishu hopes for a popular and legal TFG mandate to govern after the elections, but confidence remains remarkably low that this will happen. Somalia is easily the best (or indeed worst) African example of a collapsed state, particularly with different gradations of Islamist extremism thriving within and beyond its borders. It appears the Kenyan Defence Forces are better prepared for the 2012 elections than they were in 2007, a year which marked widespread violence on the streets of Nairobi. It would be a serious setback for East Africa if this situation repeated itself. But beyond trying to hold their 'electoral nerves', many of these states still have to cope



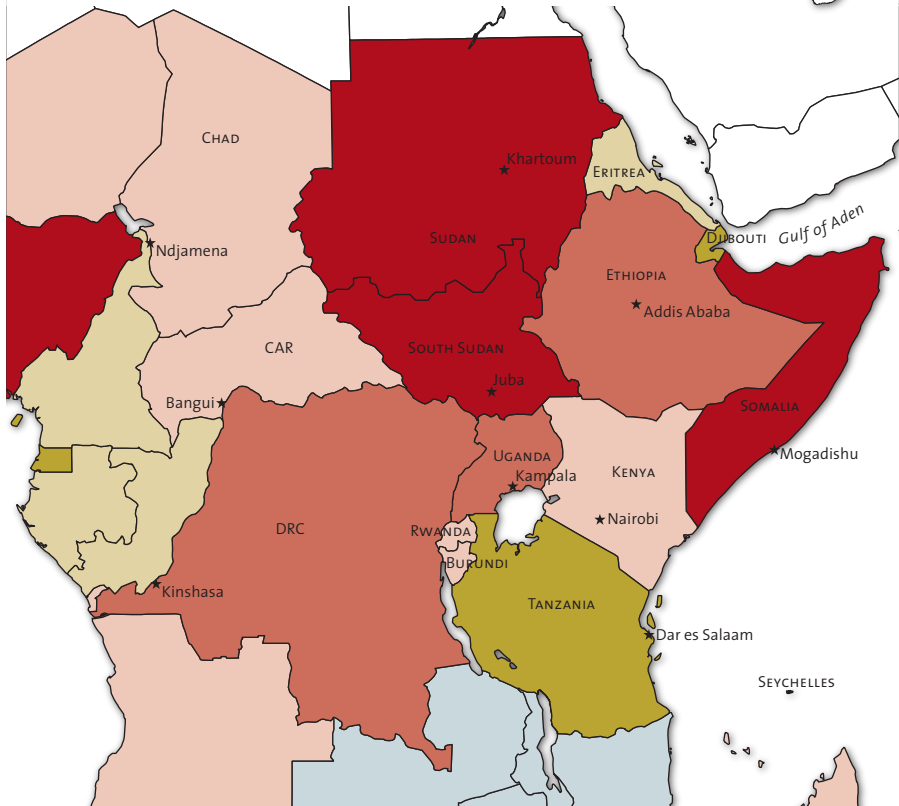
with the brutal violence of Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Having originated in Uganda, Kony's men are now active across the DRC, the Central African Republic (CAR), and South Sudan. These are just a few examples indicating the dismal condi-

tions in Central and Eastern Africa. And amongst these struggles rest persistent Western concerns that Chinese (and other BRIC) activities in sub-Saharan Africa have everything to do with resource grabs, and little with sustainable development.

### Conflict intensity in the Middle and the Horn of Africa

**Colour code:**

- War
- Severe crisis
- Crisis
- Manifest conflict
- Latent conflict
- No conflict



Data: HIIK Conflict Barometer 2011



Matters in theatre are, of course, much more multifaceted and perhaps even ungraspable. But too many analysts still look at conflicts around the Great Lakes with single-faceted narratives: underplaying certain aspects (resources and Chinese involvement), while overplaying others (ethnicity) and largely overlooking regional dynamics. Grouping countries into sub-regional conflict zones is intricate, with a complex web of conflicting parties overlapping on various levels and across regions. Delineating conflicts from each other and drawing clear-cut lines as to where one war zone stops and another starts is close to impossible, but that should not weaken the key point here: Major conflicts in the Middle and the Horn of Africa are largely regional and demand regional solutions.

### **Understanding the nature of sub-Saharan conflicts**

In what follows, some of the underlying drivers of conflict are explored; natural resources, ethnic and religious clashes, and perhaps most damagingly, the role of political elites pulling the strings behind the scenes. All these factors have a regional aspect, leading us then towards a closer analysis of – often disappointing – regional and international engagements in theatre. New actors (most notably China) are changing the reality to some degree, but the key conclusion remains the

same: Without fresh thinking and serious international action to deal with Africa's central and eastern hot spots, an unstable region will go from bad to worse in the years ahead.

#### *Natural resources*

'Find resources, and you'll find conflict', seems to be a general sub-Saharan rule. It should not be. Commodities do not drive conflict any more than they promote corruption and poor governance, but their monetary values do add to the human potential to do so. Is coltan really to blame for violence in North Kivu, and oil for instability in (South) Sudan? Does the cross-border presence of oil, gems, minerals, and timber catalyse or support brewing conflicts? Is there really such a thing as a resource curse, or is it just bad governance? In many cases, an abundance of natural resources might have created incentives for warfare, but while resources perhaps facilitate conflict, they never start a war independently.

Sudan is a case in point. Eighty per cent of the oil revenue from former Sudan is estimated to be on what has recently become South Sudanese soil. But then the infrastructure required to extract that oil and transport it to Port Sudan on the Red Sea – think of pipelines, export depots, and processing plants – is in North Sudanese



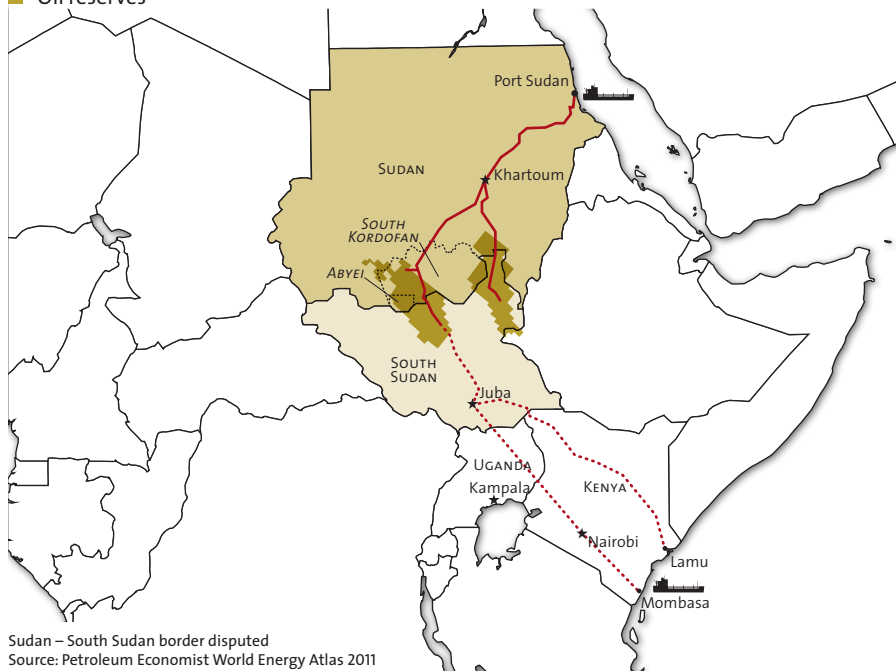
hands. This implies that both countries not only depend economically on oil as their key export, but also on each other to profit and turn oil into hard cash. This obviously requires cross-country collaboration – but with border disputes on-going, much is still to be settled between North and South on future oil exploitation. The precise boundary remains undefined and ‘border-line’ regions such as Abyei and South Kordofan remain plagued by unrest. In the midst of this violence, we find the major Asian oil companies: Oil fields in South Sudan are largely

owned by the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC), a consortium of Chinese, Malaysian, Indian, and Sudanese companies.

You might think that resource wealth would provide a good incentive for better North-South cooperation, but oil not only served to enhance secessionist claims in the first place, both sides are now also taking each other hostage in economic terms. The North is demanding transit fees massively above reasonable market rates for the only export route available.

### Oil in the two Sudans

- Existing pipelines
- ... Potential pipelines
- Oil reserves







But the South is not passively awaiting solutions; it is exploring possibilities to build new pipelines to the Kenyan coast. Even within the so far undefined South-Sudanese borders, the unequal distribution of oil revenue has created tensions across ethnic groups that have to live with the social and environmental downsides of oil extraction, but see little of the benefits.

Meanwhile, new oil finds in Uganda will have to be managed carefully by Kampala. As other African examples have shown, even well-educated labour forces and solid administrative and economic structures can crumble when resource wealth crops up. Corruption needs to be constrained and wealth distributed more equally for Uganda to make the most of its new-found oil.

Apart from being a major incentive for corruption, resource wealth has not only been triggering war, but also directly funding it. Mineral reserves in the DRC are vast, but they have fuelled more conflicts within and beyond its territory than they have attracted FDI. Congo has about 80 per cent of the world's coltan reserves – a rare metal that is crucial for the development of electronic devices. Alas, demand for such a rare commodity has so far translated into widespread environmental degradation pushing aside

agriculture and societal development. As a result, children have been recruited not just for artisanal mining, but also as soldiers to join Mai-Mai rebel groups fighting against external coltan ownership.

Given the large coltan, copper, and timber reserves, international interest in the DRC is as high as governance standards remain low. China's logic is simple: Cheap Chinese labour, producing electronic devices with cheaply extracted African coltan, is the way to keep Western buyers happy and Chinese balance sheets healthy. As the world's largest exporter of small arms, China has not exactly shied away from providing weapons (and cash) in exchange for oil concessions and mining deals in violence-sensitive countries. This is a 'quality' it sadly shares with many Western states, though concealed in China's 'no questions asked' diplomatic approach.

Even if China's approach is questionable, 'resource curse' issues are by no means new. Again, resources do not extract themselves. They are merely enablers of conflict, underpinned by the political agendas of local actors involved. Domestic and international political institutions are vital for determining how resources are extracted and consumed. If host governments fail to ask for favourable terms and



high environmental, social, and governance standards, few international investors will voluntarily provide them. Amid these already dismal conditions, things are also becoming more complex due to the regional dynamics. In large part, this is driven by emerging market investments in extraction and shipping of natural resources. The Chinese – and to a lesser extent other BRICs – are providing critical infrastructure to get resources out of Africa and onto ships. While this serves economic interests in Beijing, regionalised resource extraction is now also intermingling and even supporting regional conflicts. Coltan extraction in the DRC, and the unrest and conflicts around it, have managed to draw in countries like Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Chad, and Angola. The same logic also applies to widespread communication technology in Africa; it may have helped to close a global digital gap, but it has also enabled ‘bad neighbourhoods’ – such as the Great Lakes region – to grow through communication links. The outcome is clear: Resources have gone regional as far as supply chains are concerned, but they have also brought considerable risk, in that conflicts have duly followed.

#### *Ethnic and religious clashes*

Rather like resources, a wealth of empirical evidence shows that ethnicity

and religion are rarely the roots of conflicts, but different ethnic and religious groups are played off against each other by political leaders to win power struggles at far higher levels. Put bluntly, political leaders strategically use ethno-religious differences to shape the socio-cultural ‘reality’ of their territory. The best example is probably the Hutu and Tutsi distinction in Burundi and Rwanda, which only became problematic once they were administratively registered by Belgium, and later by the domestic authorities, eventually leading to genocide. In a similar example of using religious means for political ends, Mai-Mai soldiers in eastern Congo, whose spiritual beliefs include the conviction that supernatural powers make them invincible, were used by Kabila to fight Mobutu back in the days. The Mai-Mai has not stopped being a dreaded rebel group since, causing insecurity in eastern Congo.

To find a more recent example of politically ‘steered’ ethnic violence, wind the clock forward to the Darfur conflict, promoted by Khartoum as an ‘African against Arab’ issue. Likewise, the differences between the dominant Islamist Northern part of the country and the largely secular South were underscored by political elites to achieve separation. But active armed groups in South Sudan have



now turned the tables and accused the government of scheming against local tribes by refusing to acknowledge their socio-economic rights. Indeed, resulting in the displacement of thousands of people, this has led to intensified inter-ethnic warfare. Politics and power is what sits at the heart of this violence, not so-called ethnic clashes. To underscore the Sudanese case even more, Khartoum has reportedly sponsored organisations reinforcing Islamist uprisings (e.g., in Eritrea, Uganda, and Somalia) but also put its weight behind the non-Arab LRA, which underscores the political – rather than religious – nature of this.

On the face of it, Somalia presents an exception to this rule. Religion has played, and will continue to play, a key role in domestic struggles – albeit marked by Islamic fragmentation. Islamist rebel groups such as al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam strongly oppose the TFG and Sufi groups (mistakenly seen as an Islamist sect, but really a more moderate dimension of Islam) like Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a (ASWJ). But when it comes to Somalia, let us not forget that in the absence of nationwide governance structures, powerful religious leaders invariably replace legitimately endorsed political elites. The country also faces serious conflicts

between the autonomous Puntland region and the self-proclaimed independent Somaliland.

Ethno-religious clashes – whether politically steered or not – also have a relatively high risk of spillover and thus, regional disruption. For Somalia, this has become all the more true now that al-Shabaab has been formally endorsed by al-Qaeda. Yet, on closer inspection, the 'ethnic' argument does

**The 'ethnic' argument does not hold on a regional level**

not hold on a regional level. The LRA originated as a self-proclaimed ethnic movement in Uganda. The rebels declared that their aim was to protect the Acholi community in the north against Museveni's centrist policies and arms. But what *might* have been true of the 1980s, has been transformed into rebels without a credible ethnic cause who merely plunder, rape, and kill, everywhere but in Uganda. They have been active in the CAR, the DRC, and South Sudan, moving effortlessly across borders, reaching further and further into the respective countries, especially the DRC.

This is problematic for the DRC, not least because it has more than enough of its own rebel groups to deal with – most of which fight the government or each other, or resort to plundering the population. The best-known



examples are the Enyele fighters in the north-western province of Equateur, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), and the Mai-Mai rebels in the eastern provinces of Kivu and Orientale. Despite the presence of MONUC and the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC), these groups so far have proven unstoppable – endangering security not only in the DRC, but also across neighbouring countries. Yet, the common factor accounting both for the longevity and lethality of these groups in the DRC, Uganda, Somalia, and Sudan is not ethnicity or religion, but politics.

#### *Political elites*

Conflicts do not emerge solely due to the existence of natural resources or of ethno-religious fault lines. These are mere facilitators, used to conceal the cause of most conflicts: politics. ‘Bad neighbourhoods’ hardly ever have good leadership. The likes of Kabila and Museveni often leave little room for democracy and economic growth. Post-electoral battles have underscored the ‘true’ meaning of the word democracy in the Democratic Republic of Congo: retaining power at all costs. Like Kenya, where Odinga might not have a smooth electoral ride this year with secessionist claims popping up on the coastline, the DRC is definitely one to watch in 2012 for future conflict.

Somalia is even more worrying. The internationally recognised TFG is fighting al-Shabaab on its territory, but has achieved remarkably little in terms of stability since taking office. Domestic clashes and subsequent regional shockwaves would hardly come as a shock after the August elections – assuming they actually happen in the first place. The TFG’s premature claim to another three years in office – not much to the liking of al-Shabaab – is bound to provoke violent reactions within and beyond the country’s boundaries. On a more general level, and beyond al-Shabaab, the real problem is that Sharif’s leadership has been weak and corrupt, and most importantly, endeavours to forcefully centralise a state that in essence embodies a collection of clans. Bypassing local leadership obviously does not sit well with local grassroots movements. This has turned Somalia into a fragmented ‘centre versus clan’ battlefield, rendering the country increasingly dysfunctional. This does not imply a state of anarchy. In fact, local clans are organised very strongly, but at a national level these distinct pieces are becoming almost impossible to pull together. Little surprise that high-return ‘careers’ in piracy continue to flourish in Somalia, with many regional authorities accepting money to turn a blind eye to such



activities. Piracy has hit not only the Gulf of Aden, but attacks have been registered along the Kenyan and Tanzanian coastlines, many miles out into the Indian Ocean – and on some accounts, even as far as the Seychelles.

‘Conflict resolution’ in Sudan will be delayed by resource questions and ethnic uprisings, but the key problem lies with political desires for pieces of territory. Omar al-Bashir is yet another example of corrupt leadership suffering from ‘land lust’. Secessionist movements in South Sudan and Somaliland have demanded independence, again resulting in societal insecurity caused

by political desires. But as South Sudanese independence disposed of the common (northern) enemy, the old internal fault lines become more apparent. The mosaic of ethnic communities in South Sudan, where militias are still being ideologically fed and kept alive by local leaders, now needs good governance at multiple levels. Local dynamics beyond Juba are essential to the new-born country’s resource-rich soil, but the ruling Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) has established its territorial presence, and it refuses to jeopardise individual power and money for a more decentralised state structure.

### The Middle and the Horn of Africa: Countries in comparison

Country	Population (million)	Real growth rate (%)	People in poverty (%)*	Corruption Perception Index**
Burundi	10,2	4.2	81	172
CAR	5,0	4.1	62.8	154
Chad	10,8	2.5	NA	168
DRC	71,7	6.5	59.2	168
Ethiopia	90,9	7.4	39	120
Kenya	41,1	5.3	19.7	154
Rwanda	11,4	7	76.8	46
Somalia	9,9	2.6	NA	182
South Sudan	8,2	NA	NA	NA
Sudan	36,8	-0.2	NA	177
Uganda	34,6	6.4	28.7	143

\* Less than US\$ 1.25 per day

\*\* Rank out of 182 countries

Sources: Transparency International, UNDP, CIA World Factbook 2011



The crucial problem is that while key facilitators of conflict in Central and Eastern Africa are increasingly regional, the political elites on all levels still work from a national basis. Self-regarding policies reflect little concern for the security situation in remote regions on their own territories, let alone for what happens beyond national borders. As noted, the LRA is not about domestic ethnic issues, but about regional politics. The Armed Forces of Uganda are probably the only army in the region capable of stopping Kony's rampage across DRC, CAR, and South Sudanese borders. But with the LRA no longer on Ugandan soil, Museveni has lost interest in providing troop contributions to help solve the matter.

Meanwhile, tensions between Chad and Sudan over supporting rebel groups across borders have eased, but only because it suited new political priorities, not because of changed interaction between different ethnic groups. In light of recent elections and South Sudanese independence, it seemed like a good idea to adhere to the Joint Border Force established in 2010. To achieve an agreement on the North-South divide, the goodwill of oil companies, local communities, and the governments involved will be vital. But so far, pipeline politics have hampered stability, harmed economic

development, and halted peace talks. Add to this the endemic border disputes and a failed Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and it becomes clear that independence is by no means a fast track to a war-free neighbourhood.

The overall upshot is that conflicts in Central and Eastern Africa are complex. While a toxic mix of resources, supposed ethno-religious divisions, and weak governance, they are invariably driven by political elites with ignitable political agendas. This explosive assortment of political desires and regional volatility is at the core of Central and East Africa's problems, but it is also where some of the most crucial solutions can be found in terms of pan-African and international initiatives to stabilise the region.

### **The multiple responses to African conflicts**

If the causes are complex, what about the solutions? Just how regional are African and international responses to conflicts in the Middle and the Horn? Getting African leaders to sit around a table together is one thing, but how actively do they really prevent conflict across their borders? Answers to these questions are critically important, not least because they highlight the regional and international voids affecting peacekeeping



and conflict resolution in the region. Getting such policies right is all the more imperative with new actors appearing on the scene, most notably China. Beijing has a big interest in natural resources, but less so in peace and security. We look at this inflammable mix below.

### *African institutions*

Sitting around collective tables seems to be popular in Africa; cross-border peacekeeping institutions have seen nearly as rapid a rise as the number of members signed up for a seat. At least on paper, things look good. Among pan-African initiatives, the African Union, managing to delegate peace and security tasks within the contours of the AU Commission, is proclaimed to be the most important development over the past ten years. An adjoining Peace and Security Council (PSC) – based in Addis Ababa – was set up in 2004, which (in theory) is responsible for early warning and prompt responses to emerging crises. The Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) was established to gather information on crises, and to offer advice on the appropriate response.

Building a functioning peace and security architecture obviously takes time, but after ten years of AU existence, the actual outputs have been meagre. Preventing conflicts has not

been part of the equation, and even where the Union has acted, it has been as feeble as it has been selective. PSC has supported military ‘action’ in Sudan and Somalia, but entirely ignored violence in northern Uganda and in parts of Ethiopia. A major recent challenge has been to diversify regional approaches and to clarify institutional competences to avoid overlap. The CEWS, for example, has struggled to clarify its relationships with regional early warning mechanisms such as the Intergovernmental Authority for Development’s Conflict Early Warning and Response mechanism (CEWARN) for East Africa and the ECOWAS Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) in West Africa. Whereas its task delineation and operational practices are increasingly defined through data analysis and advisory services, its link with the PSC and regional efforts remains underdeveloped and blurry.

Some evidence of sub-continental regional thinking can, however, be found in the creation of the African Standby Force, based on five regional brigades of roughly 4,300 troops. Although the Eastern Force (EASBRIG) managed to complete more military-technical adaptation than the Central Force (FOMAC), it is highly unlikely that either of them will reach agreed targets in time. More worryingly,



behind this regional discourse sits a traditional problem: The actual output of these brigades rests in the hands of a collection of political elites. 'Actions speak louder than words' seems to be an alien expression to politicians involved, with predictable operational results: a lack of continuity, problems of interoperability, absence of a common doctrine, and insufficient logistics. Too often, illusory political engagement fails to translate into actual deployment. The establishment of the so-called Panel of the Wise at first seemed a step in the right direction, but without sufficient financial resources, their mediation and reconciliation efforts remain nothing more than good intentions.

On the regional level, we can see a similar institutional story. In Central Africa, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) – with the blessing of the AU and the EU – has been given the task of dealing with peace and security in the region. With a formal architecture established, ECCAS once again looks reasonable on paper. A Peace and Security Council for Central Africa (COPAX) with regional headquarters was established. But the lack of political will and support has seriously hampered the actual functioning of the structure. Leaders have refrained from providing finan-

cial and political support to ECCAS, while preferring old-school bilateral relations. Mutual suspicion and domestic corruption do not help; most African states are keeping a closer eye on their direct neighbours rather than making serious ECCAS contributions.

The analytical point is clear: African security institutions look good on paper, but perform poorly in practice.

**African security institutions look good on paper**

Inadequate political (and therefore financial) support kills any organisation in the

long run. Data collection has been hindered by most of the governments involved, and the sovereignty question provides an excellent excuse to guarantee the continuity of incumbent regimes. Security institutions arguably exist largely as a good rapport to ease external donors, and uphold governments in power. When peace talks do take place, political elites and leaders of armed divisions make sure they get the best seats at the negotiation table.

#### *Actions from Africa and the West*

These points are not raised merely to criticise institutions, but to highlight the major challenges they face. Few can doubt that institutions have tried to become regional players, but cross-border actions remain the





exception rather than the rule due to the political constraints involved. AU initiatives to tackle the LRA never progressed beyond the operational planning stage, not least because external international support remained limited. The international dimension here is important, as it remains the larger operational presence. Pacification efforts are almost never entirely African, nor entirely external. Many African governments have been involved in UN peacemaking negotiations on a political level, just as UN operations on African soil have deployed African troops or experts. If anything, UN and other non-African operations are larger than those launched by Africans themselves. African initiatives under the AU or the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have indeed been more selective and politically driven, but the geopolitical division of labour between international and regional institutions seems obvious.

The bottom line is that the AU deploys troops to failed states where Western troops fear to go. Darfur and Somalia are telling examples. AMISOM, the African Union Mission in Somalia, is mandated to manage the security situation in the country, support peace, and assist the TFG. Its mission is to prepare conditions in Somalia for UN deployments to *one day* replace AMI-

SOM. As the main troop contributor to AMISOM, Uganda has been declared a target of al-Shabaab, a declaration that has proven to be more than a mere threat. No Western government has dared to seriously cross the 'Mogadishu line' since the failure of US operations in 1993. Anti-piracy measures have remained a maritime affair, with no real consideration of 'boots on the ground'. Reducing the influence of al-Shabaab is also a hands-off political issue; the US only employs counter-terrorist measures when it believes national security interests to be at stake.

Indeed, the bulk of US engagement is actually conducted through private actors such as advisors from the Washington-based Bancroft Global Development, a private military company that is following up developments in Mogadishu. The EU also prefers watching the race from the side-lines. The EU Training Mission (EUTM) of Somali soldiers supports AMISOM and is admittedly a good effort to provide much-needed skills to Somali platoons. But the training – conducted in cooperation with the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) – provides a dwarf-size solution to a giant problem. It is also based in the Bihanga training camp in Uganda, about 2,000 kilometres from Mogadishu. Unsurprisingly, there is



little control over the troops after they return to their capital, except for the wages they receive if they remain faithful to their assigned platoon. These wages are paid from American and Italian budgets, channelled through international accountants over a UN monitoring group in Kenya into the hands of the TFG. And this is only one thread of the web. Although AMISOM has strengthened the TFG to gain ground in Mogadishu, the government's overall military prospects are weakening. This gives the likes of al-Shabaab more room to manoeuvre, which allows famine to thrive in large parts of the country while keeping many humanitarian actors out.

Similar lessons should already have been learned from Darfur. The AU Mission (AMIS) completely failed to contain regional violence before giving way to a far larger and more capable hybrid AU/UN peacekeeping force, UNAMID. Unfortunately, the time gap between the suggestion for a UN force and the actual launch of the mission in 2007 provided a window of opportunity for the conflict to escalate, taking on dreadful proportions along the borders with Chad and the CAR. In South Sudan, the UN mission launched at the time of independence (UNMIS) has been preoccupied with investigating large-scale killings rather than tending to its core tasks: peace-

*keeping* and state-building. Whether this has been due to a lack of international political willingness or to operational delays on the side of the UN is debatable, but the end result has been widespread instability at enormous human cost.

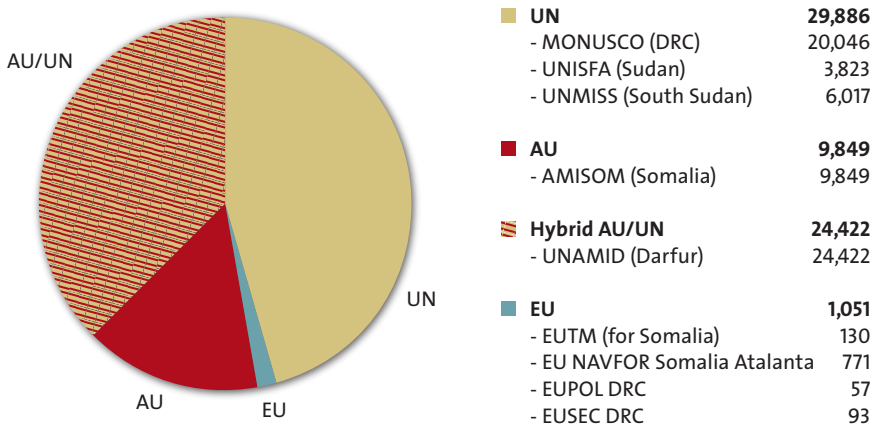
In more general terms, the problems undermining peacekeeping missions are many, ranging from budgetary and operational deficiencies to lack of control and political will. MONUC personnel allegedly even have become involved in atrocities in the eastern DRC themselves. Despite some operational successes, this mission still lacks legitimacy with the Congolese people, not least because MONUC peacekeepers have supposedly been busy closing gold deals with Congolese, Kenyan, and Indian merchants rather than protecting Congolese civilians. An additional problem is the fact that Kinshasa plays host to a wide range of governments and international organisations, all trying to achieve different ends with different means. Indeed, conflicting actions of stakeholders in theatre have often produced nothing more than a policy mess. In the DRC, contradictions among the bilateral policies of France, the UK, and the US, and those of international organisations such as the EU's ongoing CSDP missions serve as a case in point.



Given the complexity and enormity of the DRC, much of this is understandable, and other examples of where engagement has been more effective and harmonious do exist. European SSR projects in Burundi have achieved positive results, albeit at a slow pace. Various governments – mainly the Dutch, Belgian, and German – in cooperation with the European Commission have shown exceptional coherence to their approach. Putting aside French military preferences on police reform, a common strategy has been agreed whereby separate actions complement rather than contradict each other. Implementation has gone well, precisely because the generic nature of the programmes has left the main responsibility for ongoing collaboration in Burundi's hands.

The difficulty in Africa is that such success stories are very difficult to 'copy-paste' from one conflict to another, and as leading Africa scholar Paul D. Williams has pointed out, in most cases, 'African ownership will continue to be a politically correct but practically flawed idea'. Congolese ownership for example, has by no means led to similar results, and with conflict spillover prevalent in the region, small successes in a country like Burundi are endangered by what happens across its borders. Regional dynamics are subject to the sheer complexity of the problem, with armed gangs operating with different weaponry and methods across borders. That is problematic, precisely because peacekeeping efforts and mandates are inherently country-specific (or

**International deployment in the Middle and the Horn of Africa**



Sources: EU, UN, AU, mid-February 2012



sub-national), whereas conflicts travel across borders. The fact that the UN has recently recognised the cross-border nature of troubles in Sudan, Uganda, the DRC, and the CAR is a start, but serious regional actions should now follow for it to mean anything in theatre.

The seemingly invincible nature of the LRA provides a telling regional example. With the US-backed operation Lightning Thunder having failed to eliminate the LRA, MONUSCO (the DRC), UNMISS (South Sudan), and BINUCA (the CAR) *should* now all pool efforts and resources to chase the LRA where it is still active. As an AU mission under a UN mandate, this would provide greater legitimacy for actions, as well as putting renewed pressure on Kampala to engage forces. But even here, Congolese political concerns about resource-related intentions of the Ugandan forces on its soil have created high levels of distrust between governing elites. The results are increased secrecy, obstructed access for Ugandans to some areas, and information-sharing failures at the Joint Intelligence and Operation Centre in Dungu. This, in turn, has undermined CAR-Uganda relations to the point where the CAR and the DRC have asked the UPDF to leave. The depressing outcome is that an increasingly fractured and dysfunc-

tional LRA still pursues its destructive path. Civilians across the DRC-CAR-South Sudan border continue to suffer from its violence. More international engagement and better regional cooperation could easily dispose of Kony and the LRA; until that happens, expect the violence to continue.

#### *China's resource interests*

Opposing messages of trade and resource extraction hamper international coherence even more. Although China continues to increase its troop contributions to UN peacekeeping, its trade policy is still far away from meeting international standards. Chinese resource-grabs more often than not turn a blind eye to undemocratic and corrupt political practices. Using the principle of 'non-intervention' to their advantage, the Chinese proudly declare their adaptability to the political culture of those they negotiate resource deals with. Democracy and transparent governance are not part of the script. Although Beijing cannot be accused of 'exporting conflict' to Africa, the fact that China is willing to take on far higher levels of political risk than Western counterparts shows why conflict is 'good' for Chinese business to some degree. If nothing else, it gives Chinese firms a comparative advantage when entering resource-rich conflict zones.



In that sense, Africa is becoming a level playing field to assess the limits of (profitable) conflict. The 'win-win' approach the Chinese claim to have is in fact Janus-faced: While using the positive image of South-South cooperation to assuage international (development) critics, it disproportionately benefits African elites. Resource-rich and governance-poor go hand in hand in the world of African corruption: Only a very small part of the Chinese investment actually improves the life of the average African civilian. It could even be argued that Chinese labour shipped directly to Africa has actually increased unemployment and poverty. Chinese engagement in East Congo has even pushed young locals to join the Mai-Mai rebels in search of a livelihood. China's non-interference policy might be acceptable in theory, but it has caused enormous difficulties in practice, particularly when resource wealth, weapons, and politics collide (see also Chapter 1 in this publication).

### **Africa's sore spot demands rapid regional remedies**

What has been shown is that conflicts in Central and East Africa represent complex problems with multiple causalities and stakeholders. Resource-related and ethno-religious dynamics have in many cases facilitated regional spillover of such conflicts, but the core problem lies with bad governance and

harmful politics. African responses have improved in terms of regional and pan-African responses on paper, but they have rarely (if ever) delivered effective regional solutions in practice.

Corruption, violent domestic circumstances, secret data gathering, mutual distrust, and obscure resource deals have all made effective regional coordination impossible. Even when international actors have been involved, the UN has more often than not failed to get African players to cooperate better. Although efforts have been made, Europe's mark in Africa has been weak, while the US has sent contradictory messages. For all the investments China has made in Africa, the most important one of all, 'good governance', has been lacking when it comes to natural resource management. If any of these problems are to be resolved, international and African efforts have to be far more closely aligned to facilitate regional responses to regional problems. That applies as much to the peace and security infrastructure as it does to resource extraction and transportation. It is the only way to contain – and even more crucially, prevent – future conflicts within and beyond the Middle and Horn of Africa.

Into 2012, major concerns need to be raised as to whether broader



global unrest as seen in the MENA region will affect security in the rest of Africa. Should the revolutionary wave engulf sub-Saharan Africa, we can expect to see nation-wide and regional anti-government uprisings with severe violence. A dangerous mix of multiple stakeholders, corrupt resource deals, dispersed rebel groups, and weak governance in an increasingly regionalised game is far from promising for conflict resolution. With regional conflicts more and more facilitated by modern communication and Chinese infrastructure, potential regional violence below the Sahara is likely to adopt dreadful proportions.

Unemployed miners in the DRC, militias trapped in the 'wrong Sudan', Somali men choosing the piracy path, and anti-government rebels in Kenya

have more than enough domestic frustrations to be protesting against corrupt and ineffective governments. But even more worrying is that what might initially appear to be cohesive anti-government movements will likely fracture and split, adding to further unrest and instability. Uncontainable conflict could be the result, particularly as international peacekeeping capabilities grow short of cash. There are too many fires, and not enough money to put an end to current conflicts. With Western politicians transfixed with the financial crisis and Asian powers unable (or unwilling) to fill the gaps, it is unlikely that anyone will come to the Middle or the Horn's rescue if new crises break out. This means serious governance work needs to start, and it has to start now. Africa cannot wait any longer. ●