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Intersectionality of Conflict in Africa

The African Union's Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division (CPEWD) Mechanism

Ambassador Frederic Gateretse-Ngoga

INTRODUCTION

Over the years the African continent has made significant strides in ensuring its voice is heard on the global scene. Despite this progress, Africa is still not perceived as a credible business partner. Although Africa has experienced significant economic growth, it is still considered “jobless” growth. A “youth bulge” is also appearing across the continent, which can be both an asset and a ticking time bomb. Overall, Africa continues to witness diverse threats to its peace and security, ranging from communal, ethno-religious, and pastoralist conflicts to violent extremism, and most recently, the increasing impacts of climate change. Combined, these threats have claimed an enormous number of lives and properties, displaced millions, and destroyed sources of livelihoods all while stunting socio-economic progress. It is critical for the African Union (AU) and its member states to collectively address the root causes and to understand the multidimensionality of security in Africa to avoid further bloodshed.

Understanding what breeds instability is essential in preventing the outbreak of violence and conflict. Instability is often caused by four main factors: power contestation, lack of inclusivity, unequal distribution of resources, and impunity. If these root causes are not addressed in a timely manner, instability is inevitable. Over the years, several strategies have been employed at national, regional, and continental levels to address conflicts. We are perplexed by the dynamics of the existing threats, as well as the patterns of the emerging threats. Assessments reveal an increasing inter-relatedness of the existing and emerging threats and predict their escalation if they are not adequately addressed in a timely manner.

More often than not, the signs of potential violent conflicts exist, but the corresponding responses are relatively weak or late. This trend has compelled world leaders to advocate for prevention at the earliest stage given the enormous humanitarian, psychological, and socio-economic costs of violence. As such, the imperatives of

matching early warning with early response to prevent and or mitigate violent conflicts cannot be overemphasized. However, these strategies should not be implemented separately or haphazardly, but in concerted and coordinated manners to ensure tangible impacts.

To truly “Silence the Guns by 2020” in Africa and build the Africa we want, the AU and its member states need to address the socio-economic and structural factors that have fueled the rise and spread of violent extremism and conflict in the African continent. Through their peace and security architectures, the AU and its constituent regional economic communities have developed into key players in the reduction of conflict in the region. The AU, through the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the African Governance Architecture (AGA), assists member states in addressing root causes of conflicts to end on-going crises and to prevent potential relapse. The AGA is composed of five pillars: human rights and traditional justice, humanitarian assistance, democracy, governance, and constitutionalism and the rule of law. The APSA is also composed of five pillars: the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the Panel of the Wise (PoW), the African Standby Force (ASF), the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), and the Peace Fund. As the division responsible for conflict prevention within the Peace and Security Department (PSD), the Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division (CPEWD), works to effectively align itself with the realities and peculiarities on the ground and devise rapid response measures. In doing so, CPEWD can facilitate timely prevention and, where necessary, mitigate the intensity of violent conflicts.

HOW CPEWD WORKS

As one of the five divisions of the AU's PSD, CPEWD focuses on the anticipation and prevention of violent conflicts in Africa. CPEWD's work centers on the operationalization of some aspects of the APSA: CEWS, PoW, and the AU Border Program (AUBP). More recently, the Gender, Peace, and Security Program (GPSP)

was added into the units of the division.

The Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division provides timely information on evolving violent conflicts based on specifically developed indicators. It is mandated to collaborate with the UN, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and other relevant organizations, “with its information to be used by the Chairperson of the Commission,” to advise the PSC on potential conflicts and threats to peace and security in Africa and recommend the best courses of action. The Situation Room is an integral part of the CEWS and is responsible for 24/7 information monitoring, data collection, providing mission-wide information and dissemination capacity to the AU, and continuous reporting. Through the CEWS, CPEWD developed a Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework (CSCPF), which allows member states to assess their vulnerabilities and resilience and to develop mitigation mechanisms. Ghana is the first and only member state to volunteer to do this exercise thus far, and we are hoping that the outcomes of the report encourage other member states to take heed.

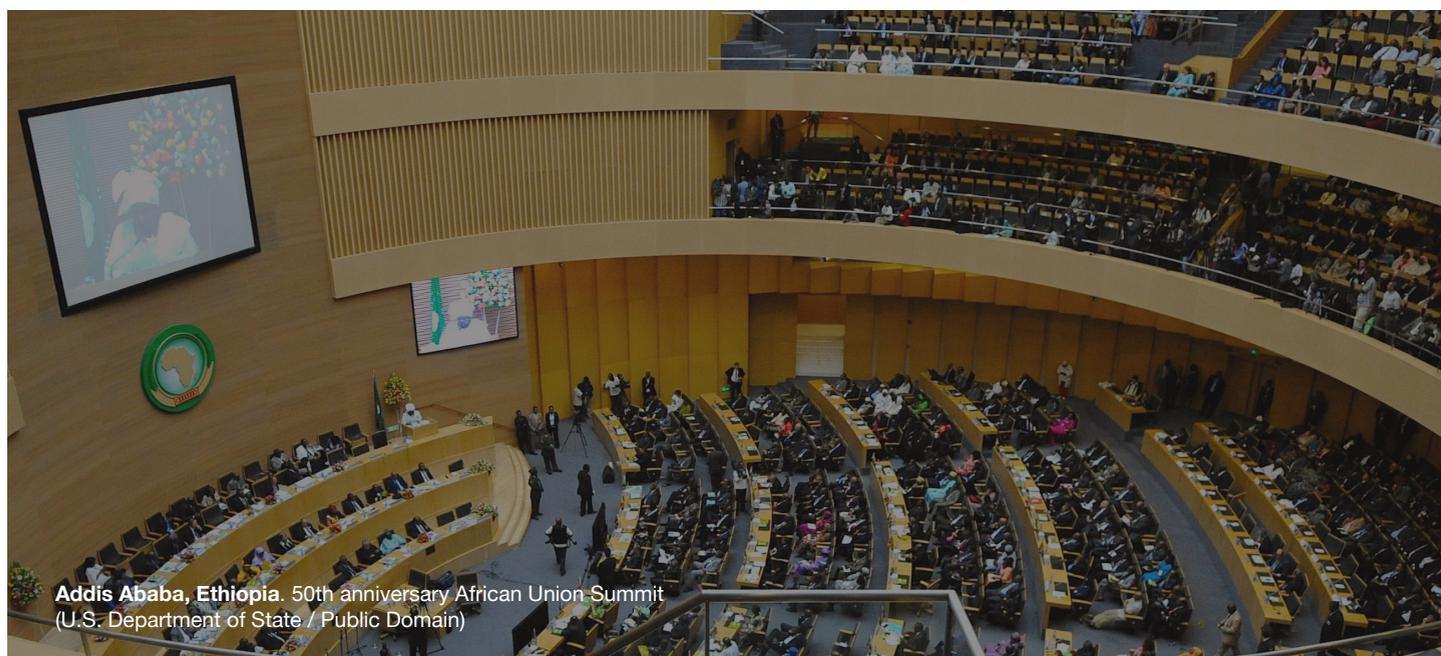
The Panel of the Wise, made up of five highly-respected appointed African members, supports the efforts of the PSC in conflict prevention. Advising both the Commission and the PSC on issues of impunity, justice, and reconciliation, the PoW is considered an integral element in the AU’s efforts of peace, security, and development of the continent.

The AU Border Program was established with a vision of “a united, integrated Africa, with peaceful, open and prosperous borders.” The Program contributes to the structural prevention of conflict through the delimitation and demarcation of borders. It also offers a platform for the negotiated resolution of border disputes and the promotion of regional and continental integration through cross-border cooperation.

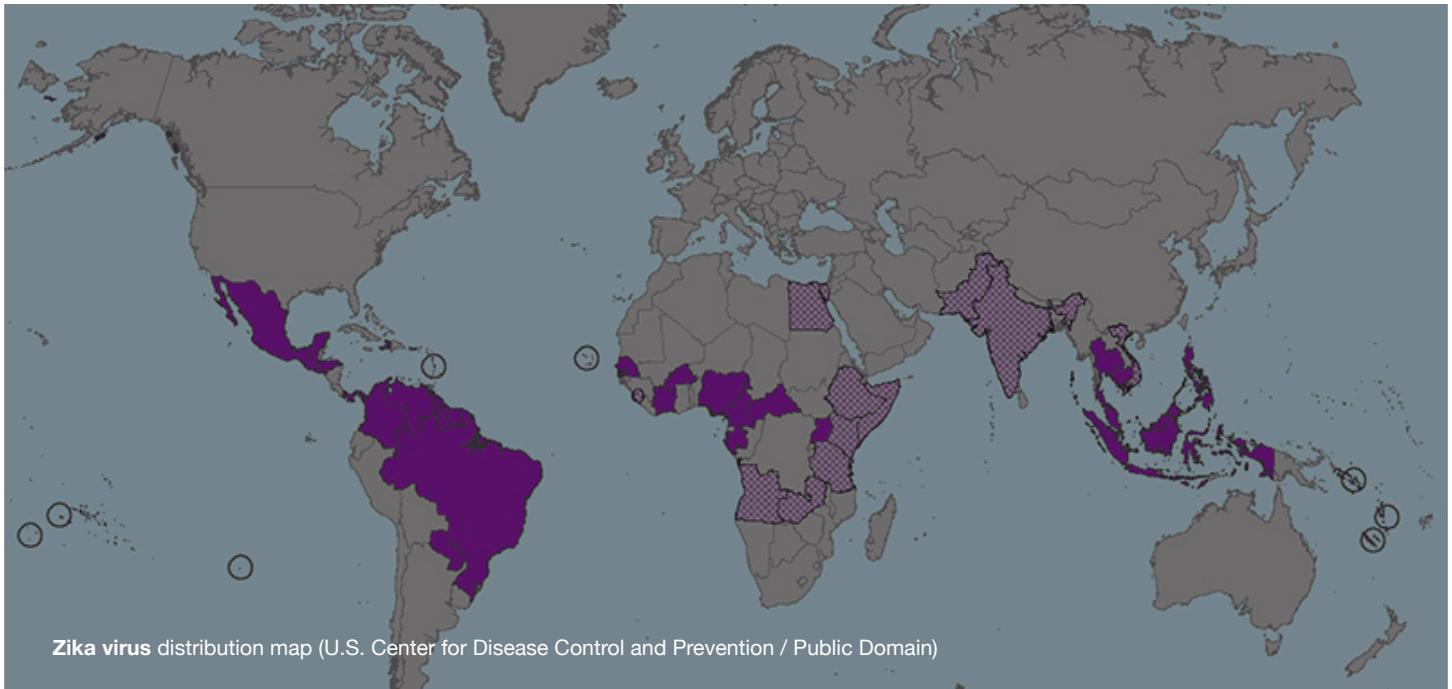
Last but not least, the GPSP contributes towards gender mainstreaming, debate, and policy development in the field of women, gender, peace, and security. In so-doing, the GPSP enhances the dialogue around the effective participation of women in peace and security in Africa, protection in time of conflict, and recognition in the post-conflict phase.

CONFLICT AND SECURITY: DIMENSIONS AND DRIVERS

John Burton’s *Human Needs Theory* provides an accurate understanding of the emergence of conflict. What drives people to engage in conflict? Burton’s theory proposes that all humans have basic universal needs and that when those needs are not met conflict will likely occur. *Human Needs Theory* draws from Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, beginning with the need for food, water, and shelter; followed by other needs such as the need for safety, security, belonging, self-esteem, and so forth. Burton goes further and introduces his own list of



Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. 50th anniversary African Union Summit
(U.S. Department of State / Public Domain)



needs, which include distributive justice, cultural security, identity, and freedom.¹ Consider the current conflicts taking place in Africa. Is it not safe to say that most, if not all, of them are direct responses to the unmet needs of societies? Studies have suggested that the main drivers, incentives, and tipping points for recruitment to African jihadi movements take place at a local and personal level.² These drivers include, but are not limited to, lack of access to basic needs, grievances towards the government, a lack of confidence in the security apparatus, responses to government actions, and generations of marginalization.

The CPEWD recognizes these influences and works across various sectors related to peace and security. CPEWD's mandate is two-fold: conflict prevention and early warning. Therefore, it is within our mandate to assist member states in ensuring "human needs" are met before it is too late. This is of course challenging not only because of the growing number of threats in the continent, but also because of the lack of urgency amongst AU member states to respond in a timely manner.

That Africa currently faces irreversible consequences related to climate change is not new information. Most African countries rely on agriculture to generate revenue. Climate change is directly threatening agro-productivity and security in Africa, leading to an increase in clashes between farmers and herdsmen. It can also trigger environmental migration caused by environmental

crises such as drought, famine, water scarcity, and soil degradation. On top of this, it can further exacerbate land-use conflicts as people resettle to areas with arable land. Climate change can also lead to the emergence of conflict following natural disasters (i.e., flooding) and the inability of governments to assist all of its citizens.³ Though Africa is considered among the least responsible for greenhouse gas emissions, its reliance on climate-dependent sectors and its history of resource, ethnic, and political discord puts it at high risk of climate-induced conflict.⁴ The AU underscores the need for member states to take this seriously, and expresses grave concern about the vulnerability of Africa's socio-economic and productive systems to climate change and the continent's low mitigation and response capacities. Despite perceived lack of control over climate, managing its effects on the continent is explicitly the responsibility of Africans.

Africa is also grappling with the spread of infectious diseases. The continent will likely remain vulnerable to the spread of infectious diseases caused by climate change and to epidemics such as yellow fever, Zika virus, Ebola, cholera and other diarrheal diseases, as well as zoonotic diseases and influenza virus diseases.⁵ This must be remedied through food security, human agency, widespread access to health services (amongst other basic services), and sustainable and equitable resource allocation.

According to the Minority Rights Group International, a major trigger of intercommunal violence in East



African Union Heads of State and their representatives during the opening of 29th Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (Dirco / CC BY-ND 4.0)

Africa is the increased competition for land, water, and mineral resources within marginalized and borderland communities.⁶ A good example of this can be seen in Nigeria with the ongoing resource-use conflict between the Fulani herdsmen and farmers. Borderland communities are often the most marginalized groups. They often have little to no access to government services, lack employment opportunities, and are constantly engaging in territorial disputes over natural resources. In addition to an internal scramble, the global need for minerals is also very high due to the race for armament around the world. The world's reliance on rare minerals, particularly the 3TG minerals (tin, tungsten, tantalum, and gold), is resulting in a path to instability across the African continent.

Efforts have been made by the AU to combat some of these threats through the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP), the flagship program of the Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture (DREA). CAADP aims to increase prosperity and improve livelihoods by transforming agriculture. Under this program, 33 of the AU's member states have developed formal national agriculture and food security investment plans with the goal of improving agricultural planning. Moreover, four out of eight RECs have signed regional compacts out of which three have developed complete investment plans. Last year, the AUC's continent-wide trainings based on the Malabo Declarations, which aim to create a targeted agricultural

vision for the continent, yielded five top-implementing nations. For the first time ever, tools have been developed under CAADP to maximize Africa's partnerships and efforts for the purpose of building Africa's agriculture and agribusiness economies. CAADP has not only helped promote the value of Africa's raw materials, but has also mitigated the effects of climate change without compromising growth by promoting sustainable natural resource management.

Almost 60 years after independence, the legacy of colonialism remains ever-present in Africa. Arbitrary lines mapped by former colonial powers in the 1800s contribute to countless border disputes in Africa today. Boundaries were drawn with no consideration of the geographical, topographical, or ethnic character of regions. Against this background, the AUBP was established under CPEWD as a direct response to the need to preserve the principles of state sovereignty and territorial integrity for peace and security across the continent. AUBP is the embodiment of African states' commitment to transforming borders into "bridges" for cooperation, integration, and socio-economic development, and to overcome the negative perceptions of borders as "barriers." Though our work is far from over, the AUBP has made notable achievements since its inception. Namely, the establishment of the AU Convention on Cross-Border Cooperation, also known as the Niamey Convention.

The Niamey Convention is a legal framework that elevates African border management from the structural prevention of conflicts to the proactive fostering of peace and good neighbourly relations between states through systematic cross-border cooperation. It addresses issues including border security, trade, migration, infrastructure, and communication, and the establishment of mechanisms for the implementation of cross-border cooperation at local, regional, and continental levels. The establishment of a legal framework for cross-border cooperation helps bolster efforts to transform border areas into safe and secure zones of trade and cooperation, which is in line with the AU's Agenda 2063 and latest initiatives, such as the Free Movement Protocol and Continental Free Trade Agreement (CFTA). To date, only 11 member states have signed the Niamey Convention while five have ratified it. More recently, 44 African countries signed the CFTA, while only 29 signed the Free Movement Protocol. These are clear indicators of both the progress made and the work that still needs to be done.

CONCLUSION

The AU is faced with many challenges in maintaining peace and security on the continent. We are at a critical juncture. Surely, we are unfamiliar with an Africa free of challenges, but the future is here; our trials are uniquely our own and more multidimensional than ever before. A kaleidoscope of opportunities for peace and conflict confront us daily depending on which way we choose to acknowledge the facts. Some opponents of our mission have faces, followers, and force. Others, like climate change, are discreet opponents, devoid of intention and yet capable of deferring our individual and

collective dreams. The only constant is that our people are the sole victims. The imminence of conflict is exactly why we have to double down. It is important not to view conflict with one lens; we also need to comprehend the true nature of its intersectionality. The AU can only be successful in conflict prevention as long it displays continued cooperation and willingness to utilize the tools that CPEWD offers, beginning with addressing their structural vulnerabilities. Though CPEWD may have the mandate to anticipate conflict and make recommendations for mitigation strategies, the mandate to respond ultimately lies with member states. If we as Africans wish to see a violence-free, prosperous, and self-sufficient Africa, we must be steadfast in our efforts to prevent conflicts from arising. We cannot do that if we do not collectively look at the bigger picture.

¹ H. B. Danesh, "Human Needs Theory, Conflict, and Peace," in Daniel J. Christie, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Peace Psychology* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

² Horn of Africa Bulletin, "Between Co-Option and Autonomy: Grassroots CVE Initiatives as the Alternative?" *Life and Peace Institute* 29 (4) (July-August 2017), <<http://life-peace.org/print-hab/?hab-issue=july-august-2017>> (accessed April 18, 2018).

³ 2017 Forum Report, "Background Paper on Natural Resource Governance in Africa: Conflict, Politics and Power," *Institute for Peace and Security Studies, Addis Ababa University* (2017), <http://www.ipss-addis.org/y-file-store/resources/spsa_report.pdf> (accessed April 18, 2018).

⁴ Oli Brown and Alec Crawford, "Climate Change and Security in Africa: A Study for the Nordic-African Foreign Ministers Meeting," *International Institute for Sustainable Development* (March 2009), <http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2009/climate_change_security_africa.pdf> (accessed April 18, 2018).

⁵ Social Affairs, "Notes from the Roundtable on Governance Issues in the Multi-Stakeholder Responses to the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in West Africa," *The African Union Commission* (April 4, 2016), <<https://au.int/en/new-sevents/26914/roundtable-governance-issues-multi-stakeholder-responses-ebola-virus-disease-evd>> (accessed April 18, 2018).

⁶ Minority Rights Group, "Competition for natural resources a major trigger of conflicts in East Africa – new report," *Minority Rights Group International* (December 5, 2011), <<http://minorityrights.org/2011/12/05/competition-for-natural-resources-a-major-trigger-of-conflicts-in-east-africa-new-report/>> (accessed April 18, 2018).

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