African solutions to African problems: a viable solution towards a united, prosperous and peaceful Africa?

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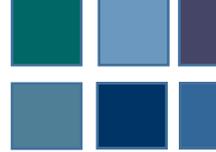0126
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Introduction

The African continent continues to face many complex challenges ranging from issues of governance, poor socioeconomic development within its borders to growing terror attacks from extremist groups. Given this context, Africa's own insecurity is serving as a source of concern for not only the global community but also for African leaders. This growing concern is one of the contributing factors behind the phrase 'African solutions to African problems', a phrase that has become the boast of the continent as well as a way to show that Africa has both the capability and determination to solve her own problems without any external interference

African leaders have continued to acknowledge the requirement for effective crisis management on the continent, leading to the formation of the African Union (AU), which brings together African states in order to find African solutions to African problems.   The AU's institutions, powers and objectives are meant to bring about fundamental shifts away from the constraints imposed on actions under the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Charter, which privileged state sovereignty and the non-interference in the affairs of other countries. The utterance of 'African solutions to African problems' aims to stir feelings of ownership and patriotism amongst leaders and ordinary citizens.

The maxim also speaks to the values of Pan-Africanism; values that aim to encourage and strengthen bonds of solidarity between all people of African descent and are based on the belief that unity is vital to economic, social, and political progress. African solutions to African problems aims to use the above in order to galvanise them into action, but is this a viable solution for the challenges facing Africa. Does Africa have the capabilities and determination to solve her own problems or is this merely a way to close African doors to the international community in order to ensure that African leaders do not have to account for their contributions to the challenges on the continent?

Why African solutions to African problems?

The idea of 'African solutions to African problems' has become a convincing maxim of the AU. It is an emotive, politically charged call meant to resonate equally with governments and civil society on the continent. The maxim applies to a wide range of issues, including development, education and health, but often used in relation to peace and security. It is embodied in the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), which encompasses the Peace and Security Council, the Continental Early Warning System, the African Standby Force, the Panel of the Wise and the Peace Fund. The concept of 'African solutions' is meant to evoke a

sense of self-reliance, responsibility, pride and ownership amongst all Africans (Nathan; 2013, 48-55). Traces of this maxim can be traced back to the OAU Charter, which stated that members should "Try Africa First" when appealing to an international organisation for conflict management assistance. This was because of the view that "external military interventions on the continent, even under the banner of the United Nations (UN), tend to bring non-African political influence and its associated problems to the continent" (Mays; 2003).

A number of factors can be seen as the guiding elements that led to the approval and popularity of the 'African solutions to African problem' maxim. Firstly, African leaders have stated that they prefer to solve their own problems and reduce the influence of external actors in continental affairs. They further state that African governments should be the ones to bear the primary responsibility for the resolution of these conflicts and, hence, should take the lead in responding to them. Secondly, the motivation behind this approach is that Africans have a compelling interest in local peace and stability, are more familiar with local conflict dynamics compared to external states and can build trust through frequent interaction.

Thirdly, western states and coalitions have shown a tendency to intervene when their interests are at stake and not always simply because of the security threat thousands of Africans face in times of conflict. This is evident in how France is more likely to intervene in francophone states, and western states' quick response to the 2011 conflict in Libya. The United States of America (USA), France, and Belgium, have in the past, used different military and economic resources to keep President Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku of Zaire in power even though he was recognised as a corrupt autocratic ruler. In return for the assistance, Mobutu continued to side with the West throughout the Cold War. (Mays; 2003).

AU implementation of African solutions to African problems

African solutions to African problems appears to be an indication of Africa's determination to solve her own challenges and leave the image of a permanently troubled land behind. It speaks of the coming together of African leaders and civil society to repair the damage that Africa has long suffered.   The AU, the organisation tasked with leading Africa into becoming a peaceful, prosperous and integrated continent, is naturally expected to embody this maxim to its fullest potential and apply it whenever the need arises. However, critics of the Try Africa First approach point to the numerous times that the AU has failed to lead conflict management efforts on the continent as an indication of the organisation's deficiency to meet its mandate.

In 2010, after holding its much-anticipated presidential elections, a step regarded as an indication of the end of the civil war that had begun in September 2002, Côte d'Ivoire found itself in crisis after ousted President Laurent Gbagbo[1] refused to accept the outcome of the elections. Gbagbo had lost the elections to opposition leader Alassane Ouattara. The events that followed the elections eventually led to the 2010-2011 crisis in Côte d'Ivoire. This was an opportunity for the AU to demonstrate its capability and determination to solve African problems the African way but the organisation chose to implement half-hearted measures instead. The first conflict resolution attempt made by the AU was to appoint former South African president, Thabo Mbeki, as mediator and when his attempts failed, former Kenyan Prime Minister, Raila Odinga was given the same mandate.

The choice of AU mediators was baffling because Mbeki had recently failed in his attempts to mediate the 2008 political crisis in Zimbabwe while Odinga had publicly declared that "Gbagbo must be forced out, even if it means by military force to get rid of him" clearly showing which side he was on. Odinga's mediation attempts were also unsuccessful. The AU continued with its mediation attempts with the establishment of a High-Level Panel on Côte d'Ivoire composed of the heads of state of Tanzania, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Chad and South Africa, that was to find a solution to the political crisis. However, Gbagbo rejected their proposals[2] (Apuuli, 2012).

France, former colonial master, eventually stepped in and resolved the conflict. This was after the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) requested the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to strengthen the mandate of United Nations Operations in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) to enable it to use all necessary means to protect life and property, and to facilitate the immediate transfer of power to Ouattara[3]. France sent in scores of soldiers and about 30 armored vehicles to help in the forceful removal and ultimate detention of Gbagbo (Apuuli, 2012). Another opportunity for the AU to assume a leading role in African conflict management was in 2011 when Libya found itself in conflict after people in Eastern Libya started an uprising, which eventually spread to other parts of the country, against the government of Muammar Gaddafi[4] in mid-February 2011. The government responded by using lethal and indiscriminate force against un-armed protesters resulting in condemnation by the international community.

The AU's Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) met one week after the rebellion broke out and issued a communiqué spelling out its intention to send a fact-finding mission to Libya. However, while the PSC was preparing itself, the UNSC passed resolution 1970 authorizing the use of force to protect civilians; this resolution had South Africa and Nigeria's support. The two African states' decision to vote for

Western intervention was surprising because they could have either abstained from the vote or lobbied China and Russia to veto the decision in favor of African solution. The passing of resolution 1970 was the beginning of western countries' intervention in the Libyan crisis. The UNSC seized the initiative to resolve the conflict in Libya; Resolution 1973 was then passed, which effectively precluded the AU from being the lead organisation to deal with the Libyan situation. The passing of this resolution meant that the AU was to assume a secondary position to the UNSC in handling the Libyan crisis, as the UNSC is the chief custodian of international peace and security. The conflict in Libya ended after the news of Gaddafi's death were confirmed (Apuuli, 2012).

Critics of the African solutions for African problems maxim also point to the fact that African leaders are complicit to predicaments of the continent. Contrary to the International Crisis Group (ICG), report, which noted the illegitimacy of Burundian President Nkurunziza's bid for third term and its violation of the 2000 Arusha Peace Accord[5], the AU failed to act with one voice in addressing this violation. President Nkurunziza's bid was successful and he was sworn in for a third term, this was despite the violence and difficulty experienced in finding a more just and peaceful resolution to the conflict brought by his decision to run for a third term (Niyitunga; 2017).

African governments are riddled with cases of corrupt leaders who show no intention of serving the interests of their people or the continent. Leaders such as Paul Kagame of Rwanda, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Denis Sassou Nguesso of Congo Brazzaville and Joseph Kabila of the Democratic Republic of Congo have equally changed their constitutions to extend presidential term limits. The AU ranks are made up of these very leaders, weakening its capabilities to find African solutions and making the African solutions for African problems an unattainable goal (Niyitunga; 2017).

The framework for the fulfilment of the African solutions for African problems maxim holds promise, but what seems to be missing is the political will and commitment to put them to practice.   The AU was given a much broader peace and security mandate compared to its predecessor, the OAU, setting the stage for what seemed like an organisation that would seek to implement the much-decorated African solutions to African problems. Article 4 (h) of the Constitutive Act, which is the AU's most revolutionary and forward thinking principle, gives it the authority to intervene in a member state pursuant to a decision by the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances such as war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.

The AU was the first organisation to enshrine what amounted to Responsibility to Protect (R2P)[6] in its Constitutive Act and in 2005, adopted the Ezulwini Consensus

which welcomed R2P as a tool for the prevention of mass atrocities (Abatan & Spies; 2016, 21-38). However, the AU seems to be reluctant to apply the frameworks it has put in place for conflict management on the continent, casting doubts on its capabilities and determination to 'Try Africa First'. This is evident in the AU's reluctance to act swiftly and with one voice when governments are committing humanitarian atrocities against their own people. The AU's failure in this regard is self-inflicted because if it were in the habit of taking very strong, united and assertive stances when crises first break out, it would not create a vacuum for Western powers to intervene on the continent

Is African solutions to African problems a viable solution?

The AU faces a number of obstacles to its development and ability to fulfil the promise of Africa First; funding remains an obstacle for the Union's peacekeeping efforts due to member states either not being able to pay their annual dues or only being able to pay them at a later stage.   The AU's programs have had to rely on funding from the European Union, the USA, the World Bank and the United Kingdom. The reliance on external funding casts doubts on the AU's ability to act independently and in pursuit of African solutions because "he, who pays the piper, calls the tunes" (Ekott; 2017).

The inability to act with one voice during times of conflict on the continent is another factor that is hampering the Africa First approach. African countries have a tendency of not acting with one voice in their responses to a conflict, such as during the crises in Libya and Côte d'Ivoire. The divisions created by the AU and sub-regional bodies on the continent by not being able to act with one common purpose (such as when ECOWAS turned to the UN to resolve the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire) creates confusion as to what the African solution is and creates space for external states to intervene.

A third obstacle to the African solutions approach is its tendency to assume that African leaders and elites have the desire and willingness to fulfil this promise; that they will act in the best interests of the continent and its people even in cases where controversial decisions may be needed (Solomon; 2015). However, the tendency of African leaders to ignore the unacceptable behavior of their fellow leaders on the continent has shown that this is not always the case. Peer shielding between African states and fear of being isolated on the continent means that leaders may not always be willing to stand against wrong doers because this might risk their relationship with fellow African states.

The insufficient capabilities of African troops raises questions regarding their ability to diffuse conflict situations without some level of backing in the form of foreign troops or training. Many African armies have poor records of accomplishment in their own

countries and are often poorly equipped and trained to deal with complex peace operations. Africa's strongest armies have also been found lacking, such as when South Africa decided to unilaterally intervene in the Central African Republic (CAR) in 2013 resulting in the death of thirteen of its soldiers and an embarrassing political and military retreat by one of the continent's stronger powers (Ero; 2013).

Differences and competition among AU member states, between the continental and sub-regional bodies, and with multilateral actors continue to keep progress slow while creating more confusion of what African solutions are. The tension and power politics at play between regional hegemons often prevents them from coming together and acting with one voice in times of conflict. The need to protect their power and influence in their respective regions has a negative impact on continental unity. The power politics at play between regional hegemons will not allow another regional hegemon into the other's backyard without careful oversight and adherence to an unofficial set of rules for behavior, causing delays in conflict management (Ero; 2013).

Although the Africa First approach encounters a number of difficulties, there have been some efforts to counter these difficulties and make this approach an attainable goal. African leaders have shown a determination to end the continent's reliance on being rescued by external states in times of crisis with the establishment of an AU with more 'teeth' than its predecessor, the OAU, and the inclusion of the R2P concept in its legal =framework. This determination needs to extend to their conflict management efforts on the continent; political will and the willingness to act with one voice (Mensa-Bonsu; 2016).

In May 2013, a decision was taken by some African leaders to establish an interim force that would create a strategic security partnership with the AU in order to enable the AU to intervene on short notice in a crisis that may pop up in Africa, thus the establishment of the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC). The states that volunteered to be members of the ACIRC were Algeria, Angola, Chad, Niger, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda with Egypt, Burkina Faso and Rwanda joining later on. The force's mandate was to intervene in a strong way and be able to sustain operations for at least 90 days. Thereafter, an AU force would take over to bring about sustainable peace and stability. The force was to have five motorized battalion groups with fully-fledged combat service and combat service support capabilities in order to implement its mandate (Kimenyi, 2016).

The 27th AU Summit held in Kigali in July 2016 adopted a wide range of reforms to make the organisation more relevant, efficient and fit for purpose with President Paul Kagame of Rwanda tasked with presiding over these processes. The goal of these reforms is the transformation of the AU into a self-reliant and more effective institution
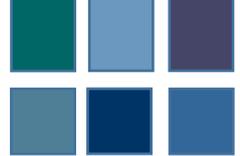
by halting the organisation's dependence on foreign aid and making it more economically independent. Steps are already being taken to achieve the goal of an economically independent AU with the adoption of a self-financing mechanism whereby a 0.2 per cent levy on eligible imports would be imposed on products from outside Africa. An economically independent AU would be in a better position to implement the Africa First maxim and wean itself off foreign influence (Kimenyi, 2016). Economic independence would also enable the AU to invest more resources into its peacekeeping missions on the continent and be the first respondent in crises.

The AU is more robust and more mature compared to its predecessor, the OAU, with meaningful institutions to tackle the continent's array of peace and security challenges. The last decades have seen African states and political leaders playing frontline roles in brokering peace agreements and have sought ways to end crises. AU member states have deployed ever more troops to peace operations in Africa, including in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan and, more recently, in CAR.

Conclusion

It is important to realize that African solutions include the planning of content, ideas, practical action and financial dimensions. The content and ideas should emerge from Africans, particularly African scholars because of the need for research that will offer solutions for local realities. Africa is one continent but realities in the east may differ from those in the west, which is why research grounded in local realities would be more beneficial to conflict management on the continent. African scholars need to be at the forefront of the 'African solutions to African problems' maxim because its implementation would require an understanding of the root causes of these problems in order to formulate suitable or sustainable solutions to them, as well as the capacity to implement them in a practical manner. In order for the successful implementation of African solutions to African problems, there would first need to be a clear understanding of what these are, how they came about and how they can be turned into action.

The maxim places responsibility on both African leaders and civil society to ensure that it does not remain an idealistic philosophy used to ignite temporary unity among Africans. It requires AU members to act with one voice in times of conflict and in the best interests of the continent. Civil society would also need to play its part in the attainment of this promise; strong political will and patriotism would be required in order to ensure that this maxim does not become a distant memory and lives up to its

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Endnotes

1. Laurent Gbagbo was the President of Côte d'Ivoire from 2000 until his arrest in April 2011 by the International Criminal Court, becoming the first head of state to be taken into the court's custody.
2. The panel proposed a guaranteed safe exit for Gbagbo, affirmation of Ouattara as the elected president, and formation of the unity government led by Ouattara but including former presidents of Côte d'Ivoire and people from Gbagbo's camp.
3. Alassane Dramane Ouattara, who was contesting the presidency against Laurent Gbagbo from 4 December 2010 to 11 April 2011
4. Muammar Gaddafi had been president of Libya since taking power in a military coup in 1969 and had imposed a repressive system of government that lacked characteristics of a democratic regime.
5. The Arusha Peace Accord was signed in August 2000 after protracted negotiations facilitated by former Presidents Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Nelson Mandela of South Africa. It ended 12 years of civil war and cycles of massacres dating back to Burundi's independence in 1960
6. A concept stating that the international community has a responsibility to intervene in crises if a state is failing to protect its population from mass atrocity crimes.