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WHITHER THE NOTION OF 'AFRICAN SOLUTIONS TO AFRICAN PROBLEMS'? THE AFRICAN UNION AND THE MALI CRISIS (2012–2013)

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Fighting in Gao, Mali, February 2013. Copyright © Gallo Images/AFP.

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Whither the notion of 'African solutions to African problems'? The African Union and the Mali Crisis (2012–2013)

Kasaija Phillip Apuuli *

The Mali crisis (2012–2013) was precipitated by the twin crises of a Tuareg rebellion in the north of the country and a military coup d'état that overthrew the democratically elected government of President Amadou Toumani Touré. As soon as the crisis broke out, the AU became involved in the situation, inspired by the notion of finding African solutions to African problems. Yet the organization failed in its efforts to end the crisis due to disagreements with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on who should take the lead, and lack of an effective mechanism in the form of the Africa Standby Force (ASF) that could have been deployed to end the crisis. In the end, the successful French intervention to put to an end the Mali crisis, whilst receiving the AU's support, further weakened the organization's much touted goal of achieving 'African solutions to African problems'.

Introduction

The 2012–2013 crisis in Mali was precipitated by the defeat of the Malian army in the north of the country by the Tuareg rebels, prompting the Malian military to stage a coup against the government of Amadou Toumani Touré in March 2012. As with the crises that had engulfed Côte d'Ivoire (2010–2011) and Libya (2011) previously, when this crisis erupted the expectation was that the AU would intervene to end it, in line with its goal of finding 'African solutions to African problems'.

In this paper I discuss the AU's peacemaking efforts in the Mali crisis. I argue that the efforts were lacklustre because the AU encountered so many difficulties, in particular the disagreements with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on who should take the lead and the lack of an effective mechanism in the form of the Africa Standby Force (ASF) that could have been deployed to end the crisis. My main conclusion is that, as in the Côte d'Ivoire and Libya cases, the AU did not live up to the slogan 'African solutions to African problems'.

I begin by outlining the context of the slogan. I then describe the origins of the Mali crisis that led to the French intervention in January 2013. Following this I discuss the peacemaking efforts by ECOWAS and the AU to resolve the crisis. I examine the notion of 'African solutions to African problems' and explain why it failed to gain traction in resolving the crisis, and I discuss the tension between ECOWAS and the AU. I conclude that the goal of 'African solutions to African problems' has yet to be achieved.

Context

When the Organization of African Unity (OAU) became the AU in 2002, this was not just a name change but involved substantive normative and institutional changes that would have been unthinkable under the OAU (Dersso 2011, 116). The normative changes were a radical policy shift from non-interference to the right to intervene, or what some have called the principle of non-indifference, and a new emphasis on human rights and democracy in the AU Constitutive Act that has been repeated in almost all the major instruments adopted subsequently (Bah et al. 2014). The most notable institutional change was the creation of the admittedly ambitious African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), of which the ASF forms part.

The OAU proved impotent to influence national politics, monitor the internal behaviour of member states and prevent human rights atrocities (Apuuli 2012). Its Charter's provision to defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of member states came to be translated into the norm of non-intervention (Murithi 2008, 72). When challenged to intervene in internal disputes and systematic violations of human rights, the OAU declined, saying this was forbidden by the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs (Bah et al. 2014, 25). Further, the expectation that this African body would help improve the economic welfare of its people was

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never fulfilled (ibid.). As Packer and Rukare (2002, 367) observed, 'by the time of its thirtieth anniversary' most analysts and experts had concluded that the OAU 'could not meet future demands without serious reform and reorganization' and that 'the OAU Charter needed revision the most, specifically with regard to the principles of sovereignty and non-interference'. When the Africa leadership decided to establish the AU, they learned from the mistakes of the OAU and adopted a much more interventionist stance in the organization's legal frameworks and institutions. The AU's institutions, powers and objectives were designed to be a fundamental shift away from the political and legal constraints that the OAU Charter imposed on action and to introduce new values and principles for political, economic and social activities on the African continent (Kufuor 2005; Tlalka 2013).

The principle of 'non-indifference' embodied in Article 4 of the Constitutive Act is the main difference between the OAU and the AU (Mwanasali 2008). It gives the organization the right 'to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity' (Article 4h), and allows member states to 'request intervention from the Union in order to restore peace and security' (Article 4j). As De Wet (2014, 354) has noted, 'the inclusion of Article 4(h) was motivated by the persistent inaction of the UN Security Council in the face of widespread and systematic human rights atrocities committed on the continent, including the genocide in Rwanda'. The AU was thus established precisely as a pan-African solution to African problems.

Mediation in conflicts by regional organizations falls under the rubric of peacemaking, which is action to bring hostile parties to agreement, essentially through such peaceful means as those described in Chapter VI of the UN Charter. Article 52(1) of the Charter allows regional organizations to engage in a range of activities in the area of conflict prevention, management and resolution. The AU's mediation in crises on the continent is partly based on the call by the UN to use regional means to promote international peace and security. In *An Agenda for Peace*, then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1992, para. 64) said that 'regional arrangements or agencies in many cases possess a potential that should be utilized in serving the functions of preventive diplomacy, peace-keeping, peace-making and post-conflict peace-building'. The AU's efforts at mediating crises within member states fall under peacemaking. Regional organizations have a comparative advantage when they deal with conflicts that occur in their spheres (Bellamy & Williams 2010, 310–11). Akokpari and Ancas (2014, 74) note three features of this comparative advantage: regional organizations can help to bring the resources and apply the leverage required to sustain a successful peace process; their familiarity with the region, including cultural, social and historical conditions, can make them more effective on the ground and geographical proximity can make their responses quicker and less expensive; and they are committed to bring durable peace to their own neighbourhoods in order to avoid possible negative ramifications for themselves, such as cross-border refugee or arms flows. Nevertheless, when it comes to conflicts in Africa, tensions have often arisen between the AU and regional organizations as to who should take the lead in peacemaking. This issue is further discussed in the section below on subsidiarity.

When the crisis in Mali erupted, the AU immediately got involved because 'it is meant to act as a collective security and early warning instrument for timely and efficient response to ... emerging conflict and crisis situations in Africa' (AU 2011, para. 56).

The Mali crisis

Since independence in 1960, the southern part of Mali has marginalized the northern part, leading to agitations by the latter in 1963, the 1990s and 2006–2008 (ICG 2012, 2–3). Abdalla (2009, 5) notes that the Tuaregs were marginalized and excluded from positions of power in the national government, and Lecocq (2002) describes the policy of terror pursued by the Bamako authorities to defeat the 1963 Tuareg rebellion, including the systematic destruction of herds, forced marriages and other humiliations inflicted on civilians as well as rebels, and summary executions. Put simply, the government has kept the northern part of the country under military control since independence. The military repression, combined with droughts in the 1970s and 1980s, caused the collapse of the nomadic pastoral economy that was at the heart of the Tuareg social organization and provoked an exodus of northern people into neighbouring countries (Giuffrida 2005). The Tuareg rebellion that started in 1990 was

characterized by low-intensity skirmishes. Williams (2011, 108) observes that 'whilst some groups called for the establishment of an independent Azawad state [in northern Mali], the practical demands focused on regional autonomy'. The 1990 rebellion ended in 1996 with the signing of the National Pact which granted significant concessions to the Tuaregs in the form of decentralization (ibid.). Notably, the Pact did not provide for separation.

The resumption of hostilities in 2006 was precipitated by the desertion from the national army of Tuareg former rebels led by Colonel Fagaga, arguing that the 1996 National Pact had not been genuinely implemented (ibid.). The rebels had become part of the national army following the signing of the Pact. Fagaga's group became known as the *Alliance démocratique du 23 mai 2006 pour le changement* (ADC). The fighting between the ADC and the Mali government ended with the signing of the Algerian-brokered Algiers Accord of 2006, which granted a special status to the Kidal region, created an inter-regional council to oversee investment matters, set up military units recruited predominantly from the local Tuareg population and transferred a number of local military garrisons to local forces (ibid.).

The Algiers Accord ended with renewed fighting in late 2007 between a new rebel group, the *Alliance des Touaregs du Nord-Mali pour le changement* (ATNMC), and the government. The former launched a fresh wave of attacks in the north, killing several soldiers and causing a number of civilian casualties (ibid.). Despite further Algerian efforts to mediate an agreement, the fighting continued with the government launching a more forceful response in 2009 (Engelbert 2009, 164).

In January 2012 Tuareg rebels launched the fourth and most destructive rebellion since the country's independence from France in 1960. According to Boeke and Schuurman (2015, 6), the 'catalysts for the re-ignition of ethnic conflict were the formation of a new political movement for Tuareg self-rule, the *Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad* (MNLA) in 2011, and the return to Mali of Tuareg fighters and weapons after the collapse of Qaddafi's Libyan regime in the summer of 2011'. The Mali crisis that began in 2012 can be said to be largely an unintended consequence of NATO's intervention in Libya to remove the Qaddafi regime (Allison 2013). On 17 January 2012, elements of the MNLA launched an armed attack against government security posts in northern Mali (ISS 2012a, 4). Over the following days, dozens of soldiers and fighters were killed on both sides. The region where the fighting broke out was also affected by the activities of the terrorist group al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

On 1 and 2 February 2012, families of soldiers fighting to put down the Tuareg rebellion protested against what they believed was a weak government response (ibid.). They took to the streets calling for stronger government action. Mali was scheduled to hold presidential elections at the end of April 2012, in which the incumbent President Touré was not a candidate. However, on 22 March 2012 mid-ranking officers of the Malian army under Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo staged a successful coup. The coup came at the heels of the humiliating defeat of the Malian forces by a relatively robust MNLA offensive (ISS 2012b). Sections of the Malian army accused the government of failing to respond effectively to defeat the rebellion. The military accused the government of abandoning it (ISS 2012c). But the coup created a golden opportunity for the MNLA to achieve its military objectives with very little effort (ISS 2012b, 3).

Under Touré, Mali had become a state afflicted by bad governance and endemic corruption, with a small elite hoarding the country's political power and economic riches (Boeke & Schuurman 2015, 6). Although under-development of the north was a key Tuareg grievance, southern towns outside Bamako were equally under-developed and under-resourced. According to Boeke and Schuurman (2015), 'the Malian army too was hollowed out by corruption and nepotism, and crumbled as the MNLA rebels advanced south'. The coup accelerated the complete rout of the Malian army. The North's major cities, such as Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal, and two thirds of the country's territory were lost to the rebel forces. Meanwhile, elements of AQIM, the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in Africa (*Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest* – MUJAO) and *Ansar Dine* ('defenders of the faith') violently wrested power from the MNLA separatists. From the summer of 2012 onwards, the three Islamist groups (AQIM, MUJAO and *Ansar Dine*) effectively exercised control over northern Mali (Olivier & Christopoulos 2014).

Islamists seek to capture Bamako, and French intervention

On 10 January 2013 the Islamist rebels launched an offensive aimed at taking Bamako. They began by attacking the town of Konna, Ségou airport and Mopti. Immediately, the interim President of Mali, Dioncounda Traoré, addressed a letter to French President François Hollande pleading for international support before it was too late (Hollande, 2013; Fabius, 2013). Subsequently, France launched Operation Serval to repel the Islamists and help Mali regain its territorial integrity.¹ Beyond being invited by the transitional authorities in Mali, France's intervention appears to have been partly motivated by other factors, including the need to free six French hostages held by AQIM and MUJAO elements (Boeke & Schuurman 2015, 8). On 31 May 2012 President Hollande chaired a select cabinet meeting on defence, which concluded that 'a new, more aggressive approach was needed to dislodge AQIM from its sanctuary in the north of Mali' (ibid.). It was hoped that dislodging AQIM would free the hostages. To do this, a multi-pronged approach was planned, including building-up the Malian army, harnessing the support of ECOWAS, and mobilizing support for the European Union (EU) mission in Mali (ibid.). The plan did not materialize because, first, the Malian army crumbled; second, the institutional procedures of the EU delayed the establishment of an EU military training mission in Mali; and, third, the ECOWAS military mission in Mali (MICEMA – *Mission de la CÉDÉAO au Mali*) could not be deployed because of differences over the purpose of the mission, and logistical and financial constraints (ibid.).

The Islamists' offensive of January 2013 came against the background of political crisis in Mali. Following the coup, Mali's military was thrown into disarray. The leaders of the coup arrested prominent members of the government, looted shops and restaurants in Bamako's city centre and stole private vehicles (ICG 2012, 21). At the end of April 2012, an attempted counter-coup that had been organized by the presidential guard, the Red Berets, was quashed by Captain Sanogo's National Committee for the Re-establishment of Democracy and Restoration of the State (Comité national pour le redressement de la démocratie et la restauration de l'État – CNRDRE) junta. All in all, the political situation in Mali continued to be fluid ahead of the French military intervention in January 2013.

Interim President Traoré's request for French military intervention prompted France to procure a UN Security Council (UNSC) statement calling on member states 'to provide assistance to the Malian Defence and Security Forces in order to reduce the threat posed by terrorist organizations and associated groups' (UNSC 2013a). On 11 January 2013 Hollande announced that France would respond to the Malian and UN request by launching military operations against the terrorist groups.

The French intervention was welcomed by several African leaders. The then Chair of the AU, Yaya Boni, President of Benin, declared that he felt 'he was in heaven' after the intervention (Afrooptimist 2013; Christakis & Bannelier 2013). Uganda's President Museveni said he normally did not thank European countries for offering military support, but this time, he thanked the French president 'because the terrorists were going to overtake the country' (Okello & Aluma 2013). The Chair of the AU Commission, Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, also offered thanks (Helly & Rocca 2013). According to the African scholar Samir Amin, the intervention saved Mali from becoming 'a new Afghanistan ("a Sahelistan")' because by making a repeat of the Afghanistan scenario in Mali impossible, 'it prevented an increased Western USA-led capitalist military presence in Africa' (ibid., 3). Nevertheless, the fact that it took the intervention of France to save Mali was not lost on the African leadership.

Efforts by ECOWAS

ECOWAS reacted to the situation in Mali immediately. At the end of its 40th summit held on 16 and 17 February 2012, the organization expressed support for Mali's efforts to 'defend her territorial integrity' and called on the rebels to end all hostilities unconditionally and surrender all territories they had seized in Mali (ISS 2012a). This call fell on deaf ears. Subsequently, ECOWAS held an extra-ordinary summit on 27 March 2012 and threatened

¹ France advanced four objectives for its intervention: to prevent the progress of the terrorist groups by means of air strikes or by ground support to Malian forces; to destroy the rear bases of the terrorists; to ensure the security of Bamako, the institutions, the population and the French nationals; and to prepare and assist in structuring and organising the Malian forces to enable AFISMA to regain control over all Malian territory (Boeke & Schuurman 2015).

inter alia to deploy troops in support of Mali's attempt to repel the MNLA (ISS 2012b). In fact, ECOWAS ordered military planners to coordinate the possible intervention of 3,000 regional troops organized under the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF). Again, nothing came of this. As the situation in Mali deteriorated, ECOWAS leaders again met in an extra-ordinary summit on 26 April 2012. The leaders instructed the ECOWAS Commission to deploy the ESF with immediate effect 'to assist Mali in regaining its unity and territorial integrity' (ibid., 6). But the deployment did not happen, partly because countries such as Algeria argued that international military intervention would be useless (Vines 2013, 105).

Further suggestions regarding the deployment of an intervention force in Mali continued to be floated. For example, on 12 June 2012 the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) authorized the deployment of the ESF with a mandate to secure the transitional institutions, restructure and reorganize the Malian defence and security forces, restore the state's authority in the northern part of the country and combat terrorist and criminal networks (ISS 2012d). Another suggestion was from the ECOWAS Committee of Chiefs of Defence Staff, which met in Abidjan on 25 and 26 July 2012 and called for 'international support for the planned deployment of MICEMA to help restore the country's national integrity and return constitutional order' (ISS 2012e).

On 5 July 2012 the UNSC adopted resolution 2056, in which it declared that it was 'ready to further discuss the request by ECOWAS as soon as it obtained more details about the objectives, resources and arrangements of the planned deployment and other possible measures' (UNSC 2012a). This was followed by resolution 2071, adopted on 12 October 2012, paving the way for 'the deployment of an international military force as requested by the transitional government in Mali' (UNSC 2012b).

Efforts by the AU

The day after the eruption of rebellion in northern Mali, the AU Commission condemned the rebellion in the strongest terms and pledged to address the situation within the framework of the ongoing AU-UN efforts to deal with the crisis in the Sahel region (Dersso 2013, 64). Subsequently, on 29 January 2012 the AU Commission convened a ministerial-level consultation with the countries of the region and other stakeholders on the recommendations of the joint AU-UN assessment report on the situation in the Sahel.

On 20 March 2012, at its meeting held in Bamako, the AU PSC issued a communiqué in which it emphasized the gravity of the threat that the crisis in northern Mali presented to both Mali and the region in general, expressed unwavering commitment to respect for the national unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Mali, and stressed the determination of the AU and its member states to guard against their violation (AU 2012a). To resolve the crisis, the PSC demanded the immediate cessation of hostilities and urged the various rebel groups to commit themselves, without delay, to the search for a peaceful solution within the strict framework of AU principles, particularly respect for and preservation of the national unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Mali (ibid., para. 6). To this end, the Council stipulated the establishment of a mediation process spearheaded by the countries immediately neighbouring Mali, namely Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mauritania, Senegal, and especially Algeria, as well as ECOWAS (ibid., para. 7).

Following the coup led by Captain Sanogo, the AU PSC issued a communiqué on 23 March 2012 in which it strongly condemned the breakdown of constitutional order and the seizure of power by a section of the Malian army (AU 2012b, para. 8)). Acting under Article 7(1) (g) of the PSC Protocol, the Council suspended Mali from all AU activities until the effective restoration of constitutional order. In the context of the declaration of independence by the MNLA and other armed groups in northern Mali, the Council decided to impose sanctions, including travel bans and asset freeze, against those who had committed and supported the coup and those involved in the attacks on northern Mali and in atrocities against the civilian population (AU 2012c, paras. 7&12).

In September 2012 the transitional authorities of Mali wrote a letter to the UN Secretary-General requesting a UNSC resolution authorizing the deployment of an international military force to help the armed forces of Mali recover the occupied regions in the north (UNSC 2012c). Subsequently, the PSC endorsed the ECOWAS decision

to deploy the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) (AU 2012d, paras. 5&7). Thereafter the UNSC unanimously adopted resolution 2085, which tasked AFISMA with helping to strengthen Mali's defence and security forces, in coordination with the EU and other partners, supporting the Malian authorities in their primary responsibility to protect the population, switching to stabilization activities following the recovery of national territory, and assisting with humanitarian access to northern Mali, as requested (UNSC 2012d).

The PSC, meeting at the level of Heads of State and Government on 25 January 2013, took a number of decisions demanding the revision of the concept of operations so as to increase the force size of AFISMA, the immediate appointment of the Special Representative of the AU Chair to head AFISMA, and the speedy deployment of the Malian Integrated Task Force (Dersso 2014, 64). Notably, the PSC took the unprecedented step of recommending to the AU Assembly that part of the budget of AFISMA should come from assessed contributions of AU member states. As part of the mobilization of support to AFISMA, the PSC reiterated its request to the UN for 'a support package funded by UN assessed contributions' and 'a Trust Fund to support the Malian Defense and Security Forces' (ibid.).

On 28 January 2013 the AU Assembly unanimously adopted a Solemn Declaration on the Situation in Mali, in which it stressed 'Africa's responsibility to extend utmost solidarity with Mali' (ibid.). The Assembly also decided that the AU should contribute US\$50 million to the budget for AFISMA. A pledging conference held soon afterwards, co-chaired by the AU and ECOWAS, raised US\$950 million for AFISMA. Because the security situation in Mali was deteriorating, a decision was taken to fast-track the deployment of AFISMA. The initial date planned for AFISMA's deployment was September 2013, but the mission in fact started to deploy in January 2013 after France had intervened in Mali. Bannelier and Christakis (2013) consider the September 2013 date for deploying AFISMA to be astonishingly late given the gravity and urgency of the situation.

The Mali crisis and the notion of 'African solutions to African problems'

The Mali crisis was an ideal opportunity for the AU to apply an African solution to an African problem. Before intervening in the crisis, France had publically stated that 'support for an African-led solution was the only option available' (Boeke & Schuurman 2015, 10). However, beyond the rhetoric of the AU institutions, in particular the 20th AU Summit held on 27–28 January 2013, the AU did not demonstrate on the ground in Mali that it was ready to resolve the crisis. Whilst the AU unanimously approved the French intervention in Mali, at the same time it expressed frustration and shame at having to rely on the former colonial master to avoid disaster (ICG 2013, 13). Yet it procrastinated when it came to deploying the AFISMA force and it obstructed the efforts of ECOWAS to resolve the crisis.

In the following two sections I make two sets of observations, the first regarding the different approaches of the AU and ECOWAS and the second regarding the ASF.

The differences between the AU and ECOWAS approaches to the crisis

Following the rebellion and coup, the AU PSC suspended Mali from AU activities and imposed sanctions on some individuals. ECOWAS also called for travel and diplomatic bans to be imposed on members of the junta and their personal assets frozen, and it not only rejected the MNLA's declaration of independence but also threatened to deploy troops to support Malian authorities to repel the rebels. To find a political solution to the crisis, ECOWAS appointed President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso as its mediator in the crisis. Following its mini-summit on 29 March 2012, ECOWAS went further: it suspended Mali from participating in its processes and called on member states to impose diplomatic, economic and financial sanctions against Mali, such as closing the borders between Mali and member states and freezing access to funds from the West African Monetary Union until constitutional order had been restored (Dersso 2013, 66).

However, the AU and ECOWAS decisions were not implemented in tandem. President Compaore's mediation led to the Bamako Framework Agreement of 6 April 2012, in which the parties agreed to establish within 40 days

a transitional government made up of an interim president, prime minister and cabinet. On the strength of this agreement and before ensuring that adequate progress had been made in restoring constitutional order, ECOWAS lifted sanctions against Mali and the junta. The AU PSC did not find the Agreement satisfactory and thus refused to lift its own sanctions on Mali (ibid., 66). This sowed discord between the two organizations.

Further, the 6 April agreement completely eroded the initial principled positions of the AU PSC and ECOWAS (ibid.). It did this in two major ways: it legitimized the overthrow of the elected government of Amadou Toumani Touré, and instead of making the junta go back to barracks it allowed it to become a signatory to the agreement, thus making it a stakeholder in the political process. According to Dersso (2013, 67), the disconnect between the AU PSC and ECOWAS 'allowed a slow and perverted process towards the restoration of constitutional rule' in Mali and 'undermined the emergence of effective political leadership in Bamako that could engage in negotiations and other actions for ending the crisis in the north' (ibid.).

More disagreements between the AU and ECOWAS were witnessed when AFISMA was deployed in Mali in January 2013 with a mandate to retake the north from the Islamists. Whilst mission start-up was a joint effort by the AU and ECOWAS, subsequent developments did not follow the same pattern. At the political level, the leadership role the AU assumed was not wholeheartedly accepted by ECOWAS, as an air of rivalry continued to affect their positions and the negotiation over operationalizing the force, including most notably the composition of the mission leadership (Dersso 2014, 65). The head of the mission represented the AU and the deputy represented ECOWAS, which led to lack of clarity about AFISMA's chain of command. Despite the fact that the special representative of the ECOWAS Chair was appointed as deputy to former President Buyoya (representing the AU), he never assumed this position and instead signed his contract with the AU (ibid.). ECOWAS also operated on the basis of its own preferred division of labour by controlling and heading the force headquarters, leaving the AU to take care of establishing and running the mission headquarters (ibid.).

The rivalry and mistrust between the two organizations was also reflected in the lack of consensus on the division of assets and liabilities accrued while managing AFISMA (ibid.). Much of the tension and rivalry was over the management of resources that had been received to support peacekeeping operations. For example, ECOWAS received 50 million euros from direct negotiation with the EU, which it used for setting up and operating the force headquarters of the mission (ibid.), while the AU relied on the AU trust fund for AFISMA to which AU member states, among others, had pledged and made contributions. According to Dersso (2014, 65), 'in a clear manifestation of lack of coherence, there was also a UN Trust Fund for AFISMA'. Apart from the lack of transparency about who contributed and how much, the UN Trust Fund was apparently used for equipment and other expenses just before AFISMA was transformed into the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MUNISMA) – an event that took place after the UNSC had adopted resolution 2100 in April 2013 (UNSC 2013b). On 1 July 2013 MUNISMA was established with a mandate 'to stabilize key cities, especially in northern Mali, to prevent the return of armed belligerents and to assist Mali's transitional authorities with the swift implementation of the transitional roadmap towards the full restoration of constitutional order, democratic governance and national unity in Mali' (Weiss & Welz 2014, 898).

The continued absence of the ASF

The first Assembly of the AU, held in July 2002, adopted a protocol for the PSC that provided for the establishment of the ASF and the military staff committee as well as other instruments (AU 2011, para. 106). Article 13 of the protocol says the ASF will be 'composed of standby multidisciplinary components with civilian and military components in their countries of origin and ready for rapid deployment at an appropriate notice'. The ASF was to consist of five regional standby capabilities based in Africa's five regions. Its role was to provide peacekeeping forces at a high level of readiness and capable of rapid deployment in response to a request by the UN or the AU or a given region (ibid., para. 107). Thus, the ASF was supposed to act on an AU or UN mandate to bridge the gap between the eruption of violence or conflict and the deployment of UN forces. Importantly, it is the responsibility of the regional economic communities (RECs) to prepare their capabilities as mechanisms for the AU Commission to achieve peace, security and stability (ibid.). Nevertheless, it is the responsibility of the AU to evaluate the readiness of the ASF regional brigades in consultation with REC planning elements (PLANELMS). This involves certifying

that the unit or force component meets the defined standards and criteria and is therefore capable of carrying out the mandated mission.²

By establishing the ASF, the AU sought to improve the integration of the African defence forces and reduce the overall costs that individual African countries have to bear on many African peacekeeping operations. Unfortunately, the operationalization of the ASF has been lagging behind schedule. Its establishment was first scheduled for between 2005 and 2008 but this was postponed to 2010 because of serious capability gaps identified during exercise AMANI AFRICA 2010. At the time of writing, it was anticipated that the ASF would become fully operational in December 2015, after exercise AMANI AFRICA II (AU 2013a).

The failure to operationalize the ASF has meant that the AU still lacks the requisite military force to deal with crises on the continent. The African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC) was thus mooted as a stop-gap before the final establishment of the ASF (Apuuli 2013). Announcing the establishment of ACIRC, the AU Chair observed that the Mali crisis highlighted the need to 'accelerate the establishment of the ASF' (AU 2013b). The approved AFISMA force was to consist of 5,500 troops comprising the ESF and forces from other African countries and willing partners (Dersso 2013, 68), but because the ASF is not yet operational, the AFISMA force did not deploy as the ESF.

The deployment of AFISMA was also delayed because of the wrangling between the major powers in the UN. After the draft resolution to authorize the deployment of AFISMA had been circulated in the UNSC, the US was sceptical of the mission's feasibility and the Malian interim government's democratic credentials (Boeke & Schuurman 2015, 9). In fact, it is reported that the US went so far as to describe the plan to set up an African force for Mali (i.e. AFISMA) as 'crap' (Lynch 2012; Marchal 2013, 493). The US doubted AFISMA's 'ability to contend with a battle tested insurgency with the experience of fighting in the Sahel's unforgiving desert' (Lynch 2012). The AU was not part of the UNSC discussions on AFISMA.

Whither the notion of African solutions to African problems?

The AU was created precisely to provide African solutions to African problems. Somalia's state collapse and Rwanda's genocide in the early 1990s spurred the African leadership to establish an AU with 'teeth'. The crises in Côte d'Ivoire (2010–2011), Libya (2011) and Mali (2012–2013) gave the AU an opportunity to translate its slogan into action – but to no avail. In Mali, it was French intervention that proved decisive in restoring the country's sovereignty. All three cases (Côte d'Ivoire, Libya and Mali) demonstrated the inadequacy of the AU's structural and normative frameworks to deal with crises of this kind. This weakness, especially in the AU's response to the crises in Côte d'Ivoire and Libya, was recognized by Ambassador Ramtane Lamamra, former AU Commissioner for Peace and Security and currently Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria. He said the crises 'exposed a dangerous vacuum in the arsenal of the AU instruments that needs to be urgently filled by putting in place appropriate response mechanisms that will enable the continental body to timely respond to such phenomena with the required robustness and effectiveness' (Dersso 2012).

In the three cases, the AU's response proved woefully inadequate. African countries have not backed up their talk of 'African solutions to African problems' with sufficient resources to transform the words into deeds. So far, the record of AU peacekeeping is still wanting.³ The chronic failure to raise enough financial and human resources to conduct peacekeeping or peace support operations has been embarrassing to the organization. Simply put, African regional initiatives continue to fail for lack of funding. As noted by Dornboos (1990), the African state

² The main areas of certification are manpower, equipment, training and sustainability. The brigades must also develop mechanisms for raising forces.

³ Two cases may be mentioned. In November 1981 the OAU sent a peacekeeping force to Chad. The force, whose estimated cost was between US\$150 and 300 million annually, was underfunded and the mission was a failure (Sesay 1991). The 2003 AU mission in Burundi (AMIB), on the other hand, was judged a success. It was said to be wholly initiated, planned and executed by the AU members, but some commentators have doubted this. Touray (2005) notes that AMIB was cash strapped from the start. Eleven months into its existence, AU contributions and pledges represented only 27% of its budget.

has a significant characteristic of pervasive external dependency. For example, for the year 2016, the AU's total budget is US\$416,867,326, of which the donors will contribute US\$247,033,986 (AU 2015a). The 25th Summit authorized the AU Commission to solicit additional funds from Partners for Programs of the Union amounting to US\$70,552,314 till the end of 2015 (ibid.). This shows that the organization continues to be dependent on resources contributed by others. In the case of Mali, AFISMA could not be deployed at the anticipated time partly because of lack of resources.

The African leadership has been exploring ways to wean itself from dependence on donor funding. Two attempts are worth noting. In 2007, the high level panel which was set up to audit the AU recommended that a tax on airline tickets within Africa should be levied without delay to raise revenue for the AU (AU 2007). This proposal was again made at the 21st Ordinary Summit of the AU in May 2013. It was proposed that, to finance Africa's agenda, US\$10 be deducted from tickets bought for air travel by anyone travelling in and out of an African country, and US\$2 from hotel bookings by tourists (Namusa 2013). However, the proposal was immediately opposed by Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Michael Sata, the then President of Zambia, led the opposition by arguing that the proposal would stifle efforts to boost tourism and to provide tax relief for African economies (ibid.).

The above notwithstanding, the AU Summit has decided to adopt a stance of self-reliance. First, it has taken measures to increase ownership of the budget by financing 100% of the operating costs, 75% of the cost of programmes and 25% of the peace and security costs, effective January 2016 and to be phased in incrementally over a five-year period (AU 2015a). Second, it has decided to increase the peace and security budget to 12% of the total budget of the organization (ibid.). Finally, it has been recognized that Africa must be self-reliant in the peace and security domain, in terms of both providing funding and enhancing its collective capability to respond to conflict situations (AU 2015b). The continent is waiting with bated breath to see whether these decisions will lead to tangible results.

Who should take the lead? The principle of subsidiarity

The Mali crisis re-ignited the debate on which entity – the RECs or the AU – should take the lead when conflicts break out on the continent. As noted above, in the Mali crisis ECOWAS and the AU were in competition to take the lead in peacemaking. The relationship between the AU and the RECs is governed by two documents: the 2002 Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the AU PSC and the 2008 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cooperation between the AU and RECs in the area of Peace and Security (Nathan 2016). Whilst the Protocol declares that the regional mechanisms are part of the AU's overall security architecture, it also provides that the AU has the primary responsibility for promoting peace, security and stability on the continent (Article 16(1)). However, as Møller (2005, 3) has observed, since the end of the Cold War it has become increasingly fashionable to suggest that regional organizations should play a more prominent role in peace and security in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. The subsidiarity principle as defined in the papal encyclical *Rerum Quadragesimo Anno* (Pius XI, 1931) entails that

a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to co-ordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good (ibid.)

The gist of the norm of subsidiarity is that regional and sub-regional organizations should be the first resort for problems transcending national borders. Read strictly, the Protocol implies that the AU and the RECs exist in a hierarchical relationship, with the former being the superior body (Nathan 2016). However, the latter are independent entities, governed by their own charters and not formally subordinate to the AU (ibid.). The MoU, which should have clarified the relationship between the RECs and the AU, suffers from two limitations pointed out by Nathan (2016): the agreement is between the AU Commission and the secretariats of the RECs rather than between the member state forums of these organizations, and it emphasizes cooperation between the AU and the RECs but does not offer sufficiently clear guidance on the nature of their relationship.

In the Mali crisis, ECOWAS quickly seized the initiative by suspending the country from the activities of the REC and calling for action (Weiss & Welz 2014, 896). The AU, which was left to play 'catch up' with the actions of ECOWAS (ibid.), argued that with southern Libya also being affected, Mali's armed conflict extended beyond the ECOWAS region (Libya is not a member of ECOWAS), and ultimately insisted on taking the lead (ibid.). In fact, it sought to use ECOWAS as its delivery mechanism to end the Mali crisis. In the end, both organizations lost valuable time as they jostled to take the lead instead of intervening decisively to end the crisis. The security situation continued to deteriorate in Mali, necessitating the French intervention in January 2013.

Conclusion

Until 2012 Mali, described as 'a poster child for democracy', was considered the most politically stable country in the West African region, which was rife with coups (Boeke & Schuurman 2015, 5). However, this proved to be no more than a façade. The country imploded with violence when the separatist Tuareg group, the MNLA, declared a separate state in the north of the country. During the fighting the Malian army was defeated. Elements of the army in turn overthrew the government in a coup.

ECOWAS was involved in the situation in Mali from the very beginning of the crisis. However, the AU subsequently tried to pull the rug out from under ECOWAS, arguing that the AU had the primary responsibility for ensuring peace, security and stability on the continent. As they jostled for position, both organizations lost valuable time instead of intervening decisively to end the crisis. Further action was hampered by the lack of an effective mechanism, such as the ASF, to deal with the crisis. Overall, as in the crises in Côte d'Ivoire and Libya before this, the AU's response in the Mali crisis was not up to scratch. The successful French intervention to stop the Islamists from capturing Bamako in January 2013, whilst receiving the AU's support, further weakened confidence in 'African solutions to African problems'. All the international actors had been agreeing that it was up to the Africans themselves to resolve the issue (Bannelier & Christakis 2013). In the end, Africanists are left wondering when the time will come for the African leadership to put its money where its mouth is.

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