

(MFI) The official birth of the African Union (AU) in 2002 marked the beginnings of an ambitious security policy. Its Peace and Security Council, backed by the Commission and based on criteria inspired by a pragmatic approach that marked a break with traditions, is in charge of the implementation of the Non-aggression and Common Defence Pact adopted in January 2005. This mechanism reflects the AU's increasing role in crisis management in the continent.

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Post-independence Africa has faced numerous crises, and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in most cases proved unable either to prevent or to resolve them. Its planned Mediation, Reconciliation and Arbitration Commission was in fact never established. The OAU attempted to intervene on several occasions – from the Algeria-Morocco conflict in 1963 to those in Rwanda and Burundi in the 1990s – but without achieving significant results. In June 1993, the OAU stepped up its efforts with the establishment of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. This marked a new phase, but the results achieved still remained modest.

The official coming into being of the African Union (AU) in 2002 marked a breakthrough towards a more ambitious and active security policy. In their quest for a somewhat mythical unity, member states agreed to accelerate their political, economic and social integration, and maintaining peace, security and stability became a priority. Inspired by the model of the European Union (EU), the AU sets up its autonomous Commission, as a real executive under the sole control of the Conference of Heads of State and Government, subjected to the principle of parity and including a Commissioner in charge of the prevention, management and settlement of conflicts as well as the combat against terrorism. As regards peacekeeping, on the other hand, the AU looks more to the United Nations, with the concept of a Peace and Security Council established in March 2004 in Addis Ababa.

A pragmatic approach breaking with OAU traditions

This Peace and Security Council, elected by the Conference of Heads of State, consists of 15 members. None are permanent, but *"to ensure continuity"* ten members are elected for two years and five for three years. When electing the council's members, the Conference must take into account the principle of fair regional representation and the rule of rotation, as well as criteria inspired by a pragmatic approach breaking with OAU traditions, including the effective contributions of Member states to peacekeeping, and their financial contribution to the Peace Fund... These provisions, of a more political than technical nature, reflect a new approach implying at least a *de facto* recognition of the leadership roles in the continent of such countries as South Africa and Nigeria. The first elections in part confirmed this new direction. The Council members elected for three years were: South Africa, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Algeria and Gabon. Those elected for two years: Cameroun, Kenya, Congo, Libya, Mozambique, Ghana, Senegal, Togo, Sudan and Lesotho.

As a permanent body, the Peace and Security Council meets at least twice a month, and once a year at the level of ministers or Heads of State. It may hold public meetings, and may invite all interested parties, including representatives of civil society. These provisions might lead to profound changes, if and when African states accept to expose before world public opinion the details and background to current crises. However, the Council has so far met only behind strictly closed doors in keeping with African tradition. This body is supported by a "Panel of the Wise" and by a continental early warning system. It will also eventually be backed by an African standby military force of 15,000 men, based in their home countries but ready to move at any time: the Heads of State and

Government at their February 2004 Summit at Syrte (Libya) gave themselves until 2010 to establish this rapid response force and its general staff.

A stronger role for the Commission, a collegiate body?

The AU is not short of ambitions in the field of security. The Heads of State on 31 January 2004 adopted a Non-aggression and Common Defence Pact. It will take effect 30 days after its formal ratification by 15 Member countries – a much shortened time-table. The Peace and Security Council is in charge of its implementation. The Pact involves a number of new commitments for the signatory states regarding the operations decided by the Peace Council, and provides for the creation of several bodies that reflect both the presence of new threats and the resolve to adopt a global approach: an African Centre for the study of terrorism (created in Algiers in 2004), an African peace academy, a Commission on international law, which will notably be in charge of studying the question of the frontiers.

The diplomatic instruments of the young African Union should thus enable it to translate continental security into reality. The Commission President has an essential role to play in this set-up: he may call the Council's attention to any matter that might endanger peace, without prejudicing his relations with the Panel of the Wise and its initiatives, such as offering its good offices or sending out special envoys. In future, the Commission, a collegiate body, may thus see its role considerably reinforced.

Support from the UN, the EU and the G8

Africa for a long time dealt with its crises mainly at the sub-regional level, with West African, Central African or Southern African organisations assuming a leading role. As the UN Secretary General put it, *"the African Union has accomplished an immense step forward by establishing its Peace and Security Council."* It's a fact: since its creation, the Council has closely watched the evolution of events, especially in Burundi, in the Comoros, in Ivory Coast, between Eritrea and Ethiopia, in Guinea-Bissau, in Equatorial Guinea, in Liberia, in the Central African Republic, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Sao Tome, in Somalia, and in Sudan.

It is thus not an exaggeration to talk about the AU's growing role in crisis management and crisis resolution in the continent. It can succeed in this respect only by working in conjunction with the UN, clarifying its relations with the sub-regional organisations and securing the support of the industrialised countries. The G8 has indeed committed itself to providing finance and training facilities, notably for the deployment of the African standby force.

If indeed the AU is capable of developing the required political will, and of securing external support, especially as regards logistics, but with due respect for the priorities it has itself laid down, then the next several years could prove fruitful in this domain.

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