External Defence Engagement in Africa

Summary of the 2016 Tswalu Dialogue

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Strengthening Africa's economic performance

THE BRENTHURST FOUNDATION

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External Defence Engagement in Africa

Hosted by the Brenthurst Foundation in conjunction with the British Peace Support Team, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, the 2016 Tswalu Dialogue examined external defence engagement in Africa. Various forms of 'engagement' – from training and logistical support to diplomacy, joint operations and external intervention – were discussed. Delegates included leading African security experts, officials, and former heads of state, along with high-level 'external' participants drawn primarily from the United States, France and the United Kingdom. The wellsprings for the discussions were four major Papers circulated in advance of the meeting and briefly summarised by the authors during the Dialogue. The Papers – one each examining French, British and American defence engagement, and one on African security challenges – will not be reviewed here. Instead, this brief summary will focus on the main themes that emerged from the ensuing debates and identify key areas for further dialogue. All the various contributions reflected in this Paper are, as per the nature of the Tswalu Dialogue, unattributed.

Security Drivers in Africa

No discussion of external engagement on African security can ignore the profound changes which have taken place on the continent since the end of the Cold War and the consequent adaptations in policy-making Africa's partners have undertaken. Inter-state armed conflict has all but disappeared in Africa. Neither African civilians nor soldiers are dying in violent conflict in anywhere near the numbers seen in the 1970s through to the early 2000s. At the same time, much of the continent confronts varying levels of acute political volatility and threats to internal stability, which increasingly have a transnational dimension. Few areas of the continent do not confront either one or an interplay of: extremist terrorist groups, organised crime, forced migration and renascent communal conflict. External (for this Dialogue, synonymous with 'Western') defence engagement in Africa is continuing to adjust to these new circumstances and realities. There is broad consensus on the need for 'African Solutions to African Problems' even while that consensus has at times dissolved in the face of both inadequate African capacity and political will on the one hand, and the assertion of Western interests on the other. Cooperation between Africa and its external partners has achieved significant successes in areas such as training and counter-piracy, but in a broad sense the relationship has reached an inflection point. The sobering experiences of intervention in Afghanistan, Iraq and, increasingly, Libya afford huge opportunities for reflection and learning on how to improve bilateral, multilateral and intra-African responses to security challenges.

Within Africa, the key drivers that will determine the severity and pliability of those challenges were discussed from a number of angles.

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People: Africa's population is predicted to double to 2.4 billion by 2050. This astonishing demographic change will be especially pronounced in countries like Nigeria and Tanzania, already grappling with acute population-related pressures. The ability to provide

jobs, education and services for rapidly expanding populations will place enormous demands on all African governments and institutions. Even in comparatively advanced economies like South Africa, the scourge of unemployment is having myriad adverse impacts: only seven per cent of the 15–24 age group has a decent job. Overwhelmingly, the participants regarded Africa's population explosion as cause for grave concern. It was not convincingly framed as an opportunity, in the way, for example, East Asia benefited from its so-called 'demographic dividend' a generation ago. The discussion returned frequently to the ability of African countries to sustain comparatively fragile state institutions through massive demographic shifts.

> By 2030 the majority of Africans will live in cities

Urbanisation: By 2030 the majority of Africans will live in cities, and by 2050 some 56%. Africa is expected to add 800 million urban dwellers by then, including more than 200 million in Nigeria alone. Urbanisation presents huge development opportunities – depending on the quality of governance, infrastructure, and investment. In an environment of rapid urbanisation and the growth of mega-cities throughout the continent, failures in any or all of those areas will significantly amplify existing challenges to the state. This places particular emphasis on the role, skills and capacity of police forces, whose make-up and performance have been given scant attention compared to countries' armed forces, which have generally received greater support due to legacy agreements and a desire by international forces to train in Africa. An emphasis on rule of law, rather than militarisation of the security environment within Africa's urbanised space, should therefore be a key driver for the furtherance of democratic principles across Africa.

Technology: The blistering pace of technological advances and change in Africa – especially cellphone penetration – has arguably outstripped our understanding of its implications in areas such as trade, capital formation and remittances, the cost of doing business, and the promotion of ideas and political movements. Technology is, as ever, a double-edged sword, as several participants noted. On the one hand, it has evened the playing field between the state and non-state actors in terms of the monopoly on the use of armed force. Rebels have better access to sophisticated weaponry and resources than governments in parts of the continent. It is also generating less need for labour in some sectors, such as mining, through various forms of mechanisation. On the other hand, it has created new opportunities for progress such as holding governments more accountable, greater job-creating entrepreneurship, or improvements in farming techniques.

Governance: Despite huge advances in political participation and elections in Africa during the past two decades, significant challenges remain. Competitive politics has opened the democratic space to a greater chunk of the citizenry but also heightened tensions in some societies divided sharply along ethnic lines. More detrimental over the long-term have been recent failings in the governance of Africa's economies, resulting in runaway corruption and rent-seeking, rather than development-oriented practices and policies. The narrative of 'Africa Rising' was rooted partly in significant macro-economic reforms that occurred after 2000, resulting in sustained annual economic growth rates of around 5 per cent. Impressive though that was, it will not be enough to maintain the advances if current population projections eventuate.

> Competitive politics has arguably heightened tensions in some societies divided sharply along ethnic lines

The period of democratic consolidation in Africa has been marked by a recent uptick in coups and democratic backsliding, such as in Burundi and Uganda, and changes to specific countries' constitutions affording incumbents the chance to stay in power or fiddle elections with only minor censure by the African Union or regional bodies. Grave questions are being asked of the capacity of such bodies to thwart future similar attempts which may be planned in other countries due to hold elections.

Yet while some argue that hard-won democratic gains are being taken away from citizens, statistics strongly suggest that Africans' preference for democracy continues to grow steadily: by almost 3:1 Africans prefer democracy to any other kind of government. At the macro level, the quality of governance will become of ever-increasing importance as the global commodities market cools even further and the imperative to diversify African economies grows still more acute. At the level of African militaries, 'transparency, trust and time' will be critical. Their reputation is burdened by colonial and post-colonial legacies, where armed forces historically served the narrow interests of the regime and were feared by the citizenry. Since the end of the Cold War, the institutional and financial make-up of African militaries has improved considerably. But concerns remain over how adequately and transparently they are funded and equipped for the tasks mandated by the civil power, whether peace-keeping/peace support roles or counter-insurgency. Better governance over countries' security apparatuses will generate wide development benefits.

Interests

A recurring theme of conferences – not just on security but across a range of topics – involving African countries and their external partners is 'interests'. Typically the question of national interests is framed as if 'Africa' has a set of interests which are then discussed in the context of how external actors might respond to those needs and demands. Several participants at the Dialogue attempted to break the mould of such debates by examining in more detail not just the grounds for cooperation between Africa and its partners but also respective levels of ambition and where national interests – all states have them – might conflict and how we might all be more open in articulating them. More transparency will enhance the prospects for genuine sustainable partnerships.

> European nations do not want to be the victim of African problems

Despite deep historical roots in the continent, the United Kingdom's interest in African security has narrowed recently to specific challenges to UK and Europe emanating from the continent's current demographic boom. The language of 'threat' rather than 'opportunity' tends to dominate British discourse on Africa, namely that in the future the continent's institutions may be unable to cope with the demographic expansion and will result in the exporting of security threats to Europe, in the form of terrorism and forced migration. Crudely put, European nations do not want to be the victim of African problems. While such blunt assessments may be a fair characterisation of the view of Africa from London, there was also a sense that the UK required a more sophisticated grasp of the multifaceted nature of the terrorism/migration problem in Africa, as well as the need to devise a holistic, forward-looking strategic approach to the continent.

US interests in Africa have also, for various reasons, attenuated since the end of the Cold War, even if it has taken on different hues – from a sense of having no vital interests circa 1990 to a focus on peacekeeping in the aftermath of Somalia and Rwanda, towards greater sensitivity to potential threats from radical Islamist terrorism after 9/11 and then to the current posture framed by the development of AFRICOM and the consequent ability to engage on African security issues in a much more systematic, effective and joined-up manner. Still, US military-to-military interaction with African forces can generally be regarded as intermittent rather than persistent.

As for France, it has retained economic, cultural and historical ties in West and central Africa (in addition to strong business ties with South Africa and Nigeria) and is conducting significant security operations across a number of countries. France played a decisive role in Mali, the Ivory Coast and the Central African Republic, all at significant cost to the French purse. France's role in Africa is, as ever, subject to contrasting interpretations, which reflected in the differing emphases at the Dialogue placed on multilateralism or unilateralism. While numerous examples of France supporting African

regional or continental initiatives were highlighted, in the particular case of ECOWAS it was suggested by one participant that French actions (namely the ad hoc G5 Sahel partnership) may be undermining the organisation. What is certain is that France's pivotal involvement – particularly in Mali – has raised stark questions about the political will and capacity of Africa's regional and continental bodies to generate timely and effective responses on their own. France's overall contribution across a number of theatres should not be underestimated, nor the fact that the current administration in Paris was initially very skeptical about the efficacy of French intervention in Africa. Some African states still express unease over France's agenda in the region, though its recent interventions have been at the behest of states on a mandate given by the UN Security Council and on the basis of bilateral Defence MoUs enshrined in existing partnerships.

This question of 'in whose interests?' which interventions and operations are mounted, and which are not, percolated throughout the Dialogue, and was expressed most potently over the Libya intervention discussed below.

Partnership

'We fear each other because we don't communicate with each other; partnership is very important, to remove some of the fears and doubts'. This observation reflected negative experiences of both African-external and intra-African defence engagement, where levels of trust were low, often on account of little or no intelligence and information-sharing. All recognised that sharing intelligence is, by its very nature, difficult but equally the consequences of apparent 'partners' in operations not doing so, or doing so in an uncoordinated manner, can be calamitous. This issue arose powerfully in the context of the fight against Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria, where initially Nigeria's key development partners were reluctant to share information; but later successes can at least partly be attributed to much greater intelligence sharing on the Boko Haram threat between external and local partners engaged across the Lake Chad Basin. Similar partnership challenges are currently the focus of discussions in Somalia on how to address Al-Shabaab, as all parties look for ways to reduce the organisation's conventional and asymmetric capabilities. Lest this be considered an African problem, one participant observed that the counter-insurgency partnership between Colombia and the US was initially enfeebled by similar deficits of trust, but over time and through experiences they converged tightly.

Numerous instances of effective cooperation were cited in the discussions, including notably President Obama's Security Governance Initiative (SGI) with six African countries. Through various mechanisms of consultation and engagement, effectively a built-in system of mutual responsibility and accountability is created. Notwithstanding SGI, however, greater attention on the methods and means of funding African militaries is essential. Without due transparency and care in budgeting for armed forces, they can become domestic political and economic actors, resulting in various forms of rent-seeking and off-budget financing (ie involvement in business deals) that harm civil-military relations and erode their credibility. In addition, on many occasions the relative imbalance in capabilities between African countries and external actors has resulted in a situation more akin to patronage than true partnership.

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Part of that challenge relates to a lack of transparency over military cooperation agreements and inadequate definitions of the requirement. Moreover, it also speaks to the need for Africa's external partners to better understand the learnings and skill-sets African militaries have acquired over the past few decades in highly complex and demanding theatres

such as Somalia. On some occasions, decried a few of the African participants, there was a perception that external partners thought they were engaging with counterparts in Africa who 'had never held a rifle'.

Critical to the success of any partnership is some overlapping of interests, which places added importance on greater transparency and integrity in everyone putting those on the table. Another issue vital to the success of African–External partnerships,

only briefly highlighted at the Dialogue but which merits further examination, is how forms of multilateral defence cooperation are most effectively driven – through regional bodies (eg ECOWAS), continent-wide organisations (AU) or key swing states (eg South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya). Decisions will hinge heavily on which actor(s) is deemed most capable of delivering desired security outcomes and effects.

Long-Term (Institution Building) versus Short-Term (Operational/ Combat Support) Cooperation

The issue of partnership hews closely to the thorny challenge of timing. Plans and policies are one thing, but invariably the effort and resources of external engagement are weighted heavily towards the urgent requirements of a particular crisis. Once you get past the urgent short-term need, other emerging issues take precedence and it becomes difficult to maintain the time and investment on helping to build institutions – even though it is these institutions which will enable governments to address security challenges without the need (or with reduced help) of external partners. This dilemma or paradox was framed by some participants as a choice between 'persistent presence versus intermittent response'. A related trade-off was between 'capability substitution' and partnership – that is, temporarily fill the gap in capability of local actors, but in doing so your relationship ceases to be based on partnership. Getting the balance right is not easy.

There was wide agreement that the military dimension of cooperation with Africa needs to become more sophisticated and strategic – it cannot simply be based on equipment provision, training at platoon and company-level, and improving combat performance (not least because, tactically, African militaries typically now have more to teach others than to be taught). Rather, assistance should reflect external partners' own experience of the importance

of institutional development (personnel, culture, budgeting and so on) within their respective armed forces. One participant noted, however, that military assistance has only been helpful when the country in question has gone through its own reform process. Where they have not, all the military assistance in the world is only likely to enable negative dynamics. In most African states, the military in the post-Colonial period has often been perceived as somehow 'outside' society, but only now are militaries beginning to be accepted as 'part of the people'.

Critically, Africa needs to build institutions that are relevant to the state and its needs. If external partners are to be involved in helping to build the institutions necessary for creating a capable state, the relationship must be approached as one of equals. This is as much an external as an African challenge, because historically African states have not evinced much confidence in themselves or their regional economic communities. Relations with China, a subject not addressed at length during the Dialogue but undeniably critical, bear that out: Africa defaults into assuming that it will always lose out in bilateral relations with China. This mindset must change if African states are to effectively promote their own interests, not least in its security partnerships with China or Western countries.

Libya, Terrorism and other challenges

Throughout the Dialogue, the issue of external defence engagement in Africa naturally threw up

concrete examples where cooperation had succeeded (such as in the military piece of the joint response to

the Ebola crisis) or failed (Libya), as well as future scenarios which may turn on the quality of those partnerships.

That the 2011 intervention in Libya and the consequences which infected the whole Sahel region is a point of contention between Africa and its external partners is clear, though the Dialogue only began to scratch the surface of some of the key departure points. The Libya experience has emboldened perceptions on the continent that major power interests can still undermine stability in parts of the continent. Doubts were raised over whether there has been an adequate reckoning of the ways those interests – underpinned by their preponderance of resources – effectively blocked alternative means to address the crisis which were taking shape on the continent. Overall, there was a strong sense that collectively more reflection on what 'Libya' means is needed – in order to absorb the lessons (eg, the principle of 'doing no harm' and the dangers of unintended consequences versus the ever-present pressures 'to do something') and break the logic of something that still divides Africa and its external partners.

As Islamic extremist terrorism and radicalisation has become a truly global phenomenon, considerable discussion centred around means to counter a threat to which no state would appear to have an effective and sustainable response. Worryingly, the evidence suggests that the problem will get substantially worse, with spillover of violence across borders, further fueled by mass forced migration. As such, there may be a closing window of opportunity to engage before the problems escalate exponentially. Engagement

ought to occur not just between Africa and Western partners but also among all potential partners in this fight, including Iran, Russia and China.

Part of the response must be more effective counter-narratives against terrorism and radicalisation, which will also help – in the African context – bind citizens together more tightly in nations which are, in comparative global terms, still in their infancy. A sense (real or imagined) of marginalisation is, of course, a strong driver of radicalisation which non-state actors have tapped into, particularly in societies where alternative livelihood options are meagre. Across the Sahel, one participant noted, these internal 'fertilisers' of radicalisation become especially potent when complemented by external fertilisers, such as the rise of anti-Islamic rhetoric and policies. One of the core challenges for African countries will be to devise their own models, and find within their own traditional African systems, the means to counter the actions and, critically, the ideology of violent extremists. But lessons learned from what others are doing will also be vital.

For their part, Africa's external partners need to have more conversations with the countries they believe are exporting insecurity and terrorism. Currently, there is arguably too much focus on dealing with the problem only when it gets to their frontlines. In addition, there needs to be more public awareness of both the nature of the challenge and the range of national instruments available to counter it. In this respect, the vital moral dimension and human rights must become operational considerations.

Conclusion

The evolution of external defence engagement in Africa over the past twenty years has mirrored developments in the continent's political economy and security context. The Tswalu Dialogue afforded unique opportunities for reflection by Africans and their external partners on the main drivers – people, urbanisation, governance and technology – that will impact the effectiveness of bilateral, multilateral and intra-African responses to future security challenges. Notable for events of this kind, progress towards a

more transparent conversation amongst equals and discussion of core interests was evident throughout.

No attempt was made to conceal the stark hurdles facing Africa in a time of unprecedented demographic change and urbanisation. Africa's impressive economic growth trajectory of the 2000s will need to be renewed and strengthened in order to keep up with the demands of rapidly expanding cities and a bursting working-age population searching for livelihood options. Africa's external partners generally viewed these developments through a

prism of threats rather than opportunities – namely the potential for wider radicalisation and increased forced migration impacting their home fronts. Such concerns were amplified by the downturn in African economic growth rates due to the cooling in commodity prices and also fears that democratisation, especially the entrenchment of key institutions, was stalling in Africa. For all this, Africa's progress in reducing armed conflict overall and developing critical skills and specialisations within its armed forces provided learnings on how its international partners might better focus assistance and cooperation.

As ever, external engagement in Africa will be informed by a panoply of interests and factors, wherein issues such as democracy and human rights will be balanced continuously with key economic and security considerations. Resolving all the inevitable conflicts will not be possible. But the prospect of resolving the most vital clashes of interests and building a more stable Africa will be enhanced significantly by longer-term engagements with external actors based on shared values and common approaches to security challenges. Mutual suspicions have impaired such efforts in the past. The Tswalu Dialogue aimed to contribute to building the mutual trust upon which genuine, resilient partnerships lean so heavily.

External Defence Engagement in Africa – Chairs and Participants
26–28 February 2016

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2. Kgalema Motlanthe (HE), Fmr President, South Africa

Participants:

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2. Abdiqafar Farah (Dr), UN, Somalia
3. Afeikhena Jerome (Dr), Governor's Forum, Nigeria
4. Amanda Dory (Hon), Deputy Assistant Secretary for Defense, US
5. Andrew Cunnar (Lt. Colonel), Office of the Defence Attaché, US Embassy, South Africa
6. Bravo Mhlana (Rear-Admiral), SAN, South Africa
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11. Gordon Yekelo (Major-General), GOC Training Command, South Africa
12. Hakainde Hichilema (Mr), President: UPND, Zambia
13. Holger Dix (Dr), Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Germany
14. Hussein Solomon (Dr), Department of Political Science, University of the Free State, South Africa
15. Jason Turner (Colonel), OSD/Policy, Office of African Affairs, US Army
16. Jeff Sims (Colonel rtd.), Rule of Law and Security Institutions Group: UNISOM, UK
17. Joel Netshitenzhe (Mr), Exec. Director, Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection, South Africa
18. Jonathan Oppenheimer (Mr), Brenthurst Foundation, South Africa
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20. Julius Karangi (General rtd.), Kenya
21. Kate Almquist Knopf (Ms), Exec. Director, Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS), US
22. Malcolm Ferguson (Amb), former Chief Director: Latin America, DIRCO, South Africa
23. Marc Foucaud (Major-General rtd.), CEO, Focus Africa Consulting, France
24. Martin Kimani (Dr), Director, National Counter Terrorism Centre, Kenya
25. Martin Agwai (General rtd.), Nigeria
26. Mbangiseni Tsanwani (Mr), Director: Multilateral Affairs, Department of Defence, South Africa
27. Michael J. Kingsley (Major-General), Chief of Staff: Headquarters, U.S. Africa Command
28. Moe Shaik (Mr), Head: International Financing, Development Bank of SA, South Africa
29. Mmusi Maimane (Mr), Leader: Democratic Alliance, South Africa
30. Nick Houghton (General Sir), Chief of the Defence Staff, UK
31. Nick Sendall (Mr), Secretariat of Defence, South Africa
32. Pandelani Mathoma (Dr), Brenthurst Foundation Associate; Member; Defence Review, South Africa
33. Robert Kabage (Brigadier-General), Defence Headquarters, Kenya
34. Steve Stead (Rear-Admiral rtd.), Armscor, South Africa
35. Tendai Biti (Mr), Zimbabwe
36. Theresa Whelan, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations, US

37. Yaminu Ehinomen Momoh Musa (Commodore), National Security Agency, Nigeria

38. Xolisa Makaya (Mr), Deputy Director General (Africa Branch), DIRCO, South Africa

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