RESEARCH PAPER

'Resetting' AU-NATO relations: from ad hoc military-technical cooperation to strategic partnership

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Contents

In a speech delivered on 19 September 2013 focused on the future of NATO, Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen listed the Alliance's top three priorities. Having identified the first two (focusing on further building NATO's capabilities, and the need to achieve a better balance of responsibility between North America and Europe), he pointedly focused on the third priority as the need to "... develop a truly global perspective of security, and the partnerships to match that perspective."[2] He went on to say:

> I would also like to see NATO further develop co-operative relations with regional organizations – such as the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the African Union. To contribute to regional security including, if they so wish, by developing their capacities to manage future crises [emphasis added].[3]

In emphasizing NATO's readiness to work closely with partners beyond the NATO region, it is significant that NATO's Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, officially cited the African Union (AU) as one of the three regional organizations the Atlantic Alliance would like to work with closely for common security.

This paper analyses the potential for current AU-NATO cooperation to become a full-fledged partnership. With the aim of addressing vexed questions related to the current relationship, the paper discusses misgivings and clarifies political and diplomatic differences that emerged after NATO's 2011 intervention in Libya. It is argued that the Libyan crisis should inform, but not define AU-NATO collaboration. Depending on the partnership sought by the two organizations, the Libyan crisis could be an opportunity to lay a solid foundation for sustainable partnership. In order to overcome the unofficial diplomatic stalemate currently arising from divergent positions on the Libyan intervention, the paper argues that political dialogue will be vital. In advancing new perspectives, which look beyond the Libyan case,

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[2] NATO: Ready, Robust and Rebalanced', Speech by NATO Secretary General Andres Fogh Rasmussen at Carnegie Europe Event, 19 September 2013, available from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_103231.htm (accessed 25 March 2014)

[3] Ibid.

it explores opportunities for a future partnership based on mega-trends in Africa, the future of NATO, and the interests of the AU and NATO.

The paper addresses the following questions, in order to underpin strategic thinking in charting the way forward in AU-NATO cooperation: 1) What are the costs and benefits for Africa in partnering with NATO? 2) What are NATO's interests in Africa, and what are the associated benefits? 3) What global and African trends require and dictate such a partnership? 4) What are the two organizations' overlapping areas of interest? 5) What are the comparative advantages of such a relationship, given the myriad of mushrooming partnerships involving the AU and NATO? 6) If a partnership is indeed necessary, what are the obstacles that need to be addressed in current cooperation, and what are the stumbling blocks to a more strategic and effective partnership? 7) What steps are required for a robust partnership to materialize?

The paper concludes that robust cooperation between the AU and NATO would benefit the former in its effort to effectively operationalize the African Standby Force (ASF) and, particularly, in the speedy operationalization of the recently launched African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC).[4] Such cooperation should, however, be strictly governed by the principles of complementarity, comparative advantage and respect for the mandates of the AU on peace and security issues in Africa. A transition from an *ad hoc* technical and operational cooperation in the military field to a strategic partnership requires that the partnership be firmly based on Chapters VII and VIII of the UN Charter. Moreover, in order to avoid tensions like those experienced during the Libyan crisis, the partnership should be based on respect for respective mandates, the promotion of mutual interest in collaborative security, and shared responsibilities. To provide permanent mechanism for continued political dialogue, the paper suggests an AU-NATO institutional interface at political, diplomatic and technical levels.

The beginning of AU-NATO cooperation

Official relations between the AU and NATO began on 17 May 2005, when Professor Alpha Konare, first Chairperson (2003-2008) of the AU Commission (AUC), visited NATO Headquarters in Brussels. On 22 June 2005, the AU requested NATO's assistance for the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS). Following approval by the North Atlantic Council (NAC) on 22 June 2005, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) issued a Strategic Military Mission Order (SMMO) to guide NATO's support to the AU and appointed a Senior Military Liaison Officer (SMLO) in Addis Ababa.[5] From 23 June 2005 to 31 December 2007, NATO provided logistical support and conducted strategic airlift for AMIS troops. On a case-by-case basis and subject to the approval of the NAC, NATO has continued to to respond to the AU's requests. Since 7 June 2007, NATO has been supporting the AU mission in Somalia (AMISOM), in particular with strategic airlift and sealift support. In 2007, the then NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, and the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, Said Djinnit, envisaged a potentially decisive contribution by NATO to the building of the ASF. In March 2007, the Commissioner visited NATO HQ.[6] In 2008, another high-level NATO delegation led by Ambassador Maurits Jochems, then Deputy Assistant Secretary-General, visited the AUC and briefed the Peace and Security Council (PSC),[7] which expressed appreciation for NATO's assistance to its ASF and Peace Support Operations (PSOs).[8] Since then, NATO has been providing capacity building support to the AUC's Peace Support Operations Division (PSOD). At the technical level, Suviyile Bam, Head of the PSOD, visited NATO HQ in February 2010. In his discussions with NATO officials, Bam expressed the PSOD's interest in cooperating with the Alliance. In addition to airlifting troops, NATO's assistance to the AU has extended to training and education, the setting up of headquarters and management of intelligence for PSOs, and the establishment and operationalization of

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[4] In 2013, the AU initiated the ACIRC as a rapid and transitional intervention capability of the APSA until the operationalization of ASF in 2015. African Union Peace and Security Council (2014), African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC), available from http://www.peaceau.org/en/article/african-defense-safety-and-security-experts-begin-meeting-in-addis-ababa#sthash.cO4raz4N.gFJI59Ed.dpuf (accessed 26 March 2014).

[5] Paragraph 28, *NATO Operations 1949-Present*, NATO Headquarters, available from http://www.aco.nato.int/resources/21/NATO%20Operations,%201949-Present.pdf (accessed 4 April 2014). Allied Command Operations, NATO Support to the African Union, available from http://www.aco.nato.int/page142065059.aspx (accessed 4 April 2014). On 25 January 2013, the revised SMMO was issued by the International Military Staff. The AU's engagement with external partners, particularly the UN on peace and security matters, is based on Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, while this may not be the case for NATO.

[6] For details of the operations, see *NATO Operations 1949-Present*, NATO Headquarters, available from http://www.aco.nato.int/resources/21/NATO%20Operations,%201949-Present.pdf (accessed 24 January 2014). Additional taskforces also participate in the anti-piracy effort, including those of the EU, China and India.

[7] Press Statement, The AU Peace and Security Council 162nd Meeting, 18 December 2008, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, PSC/PR/BR(CLXII).

[8] Ibid.

the ASF.[9] Regardless of all these forms of cooperation and exchanges of official visits, the SMMO reputedly requires that NATO and the SMLO adopt a low-profile, demand-driven assistance to the AU when requested, without any clear policy articulation of the long-term interests or the desired end state of such cooperation.

Since 2005, although cooperation has been ad hoc, specific, fragmented, short-range, lacking in strategic and political direction and beset by a lack of balance in giver-recipient cooperation, it has nevertheless expanded in scope and increased in depth.

Then came the Libyan crisis and NATO's intervention under Operation United Protector (OUP).

Fracture in AU-NATO relations: a fallout of the Libyan crisis

With its decision to implement UNSC Resolution 1973 to protect the civilian population in Libya, NATO's 2011 military intervention in Libya caused protests from the highest policy organs of the AU.[10] The intervention created a widespread perception that the AU had been sidelined, with obvious implications for its ambitions. The first consequence was a perceived challenge to the AU's status as the premier pan-African organization with a primary (albeit not exclusive) mandate over African affairs − particularly peace and security. Second, the *de facto* outcome of OUP morphing into 'regime change', rather than the officially stated 'protection of civilians', did not help matters. The aftermath reinforced the AU's position that, while there may be a limited role for the military in African conflict resolution, there can be no long-term military solution to the inevitably political causes of a crisis. As AUC Chairperson (2008-2012) Jean

Ping put it, "one of the aspects highlighted by the crisis in Libya relates to the reluctance of some members of the international community to fully acknowledge the AU's role."[11] Long after the end of OUP, on 12 January 2012, South Africa's President Jacob Zuma stated to the UNSC that "the AU's plan was completely ignored in favour of bombing Libya by NATO forces."[12] More critically, OUP elicited obvious concerns and debates about the role of NATO in conflict resolution in Africa.[13] To be sure, AU member states had differing views on how to deal with the crisis.[14] While South Africa and many other African countries supported the UNSC resolution[15] nevertheless they strongly opposed NATO's intervention, Ethiopia, Nigeria and countries such as Sudan, Kenya and Djibouti supported democratic change in Libya and the abdication of power by Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.[16] In previous decades, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda had contained Colonel Gaddafi's unrealistic plans and ambitions with regard to the AU and his role in it.[17] They argued that Africa − and the AU by default − should have demanded democratic reform of governance in countries like Libya, which had been ruled by one person for more than four decades: failure to do so had allowed the conditions that caused the crisis to fester, ultimately leading to the external military intervention by NATO and others. The Republic of Sudan went further, by sending military support to the National Transitional Council (NTC).

In a long debate at the AU Summit in Malabo in July 2011, the position shared by Ethiopia was vehemently opposed by South Africa and other countries, mainly on the basis of an endeavour to establish a common voice against external intervention by NATO in Libya.[18] The AU's ad hoc Committee of Heads of State and

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[9] See above, note 6.

[10] For detailed discussion, see Mehari Taddele Maru and Solomon A. Dersso, "The North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Intervention in Libya and its Political and Legal Implications for the Peace and Security Architecture of the African Union: a View from Africa", in *AU-NATO Collaboration: Implications and Prospects, Forum Paper no. 22*, Brooke A. Smith-Windsor (ed.), NATO Defense College and Institute for Security Studies, 2013.

[11] AU Commission, Letter from the Chairperson of the Commission, Issue no. 1, November 2011, 4.

[12] Speech of President Jacob Zuma delivered at the UN Security Council on 12 January 2012, available on http://www.uruknet.info/?new=85064 (accessed 4 April 2014).

[13] See above, note 10 and 11.

[14] Mehari Taddele Maru, "On Unconstitutional Changes of Government: The Case of Libya"; *ISS Today,* available from http://www.iss.co.za/iss_today.php?ID=1348 (accessed 27 March 2014). For the detailed position and effort of the AU, see the Report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on the Activities of the AU High Level Ad Hoc Committee on the Situation in Libya, PSC 275th Meeting, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 26 April 2011, PRC/PR/2(CCLXXV).

[15] South Africa actually voted first in support of UNSC Resolutions 1970 and 1973.

[16] See Mehari Taddele Maru, "Ethiopia and AU", in *The African Union in Light of the Arab Revolts: An appraisal of the foreign policy and security objectives of South Africa, Ethiopia and Algeria*, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala Discussion Paper, 76, ISSN 1104-8417 May 2013, http://nai.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:622198 (accessed on 2 April 2014).

[17] Mehari Taddele Maru, "How the AU Should Have Recognized the Libyan NTC"; *ISS Today,* Institute for Security Studies, available from http://www.iss.co.za/iss_today.php?ID=1348 (accessed 27 March 2014).

[18] See above, note 16.

Government, chaired by South African President Jacob Zuma, decided not to recognize the NTC even after Colonel Gaddafi had left Tripoli, whereas Ethiopia and Nigeria issued a joint communiqué recognizing it. South Africa, leading the AU as chair of the ad hoc Committee, opposed NATO's intervention and later called for an investigation into Alliance activities.[19] The opposition to OUP emanated from the belief that, despite the need for military intervention to solve the Libyan crisis, the AU was clear from the beginning that the long-term solution lay in an inclusive political process.

The AU and various observers (including this author) have unfortunately been proved right by the current situation in Libya, forcing a rethink about the tendency to put the military ahead of a comprehensive diplomatic and political roadmap for peace.[20] In retrospect, it can persuasively be argued that the AU's roadmap might have mitigated the grave crisis that Libya is still experiencing. In addition, NATO would have been spared the negative reaction to its military intervention, which it has experienced in many parts of Africa. A positive consequence of NATO's involvement in Libya is the lesson learned in this respect – i.e., that the AU has to proactively prevent such situations from festering and turning into global threats that require outside intervention.

A severe diplomatic fracture followed the political differences over the Libyan crisis and also provide a setback to the smooth development of technical-military cooperation. In 2011, the leadership of AUC instructed its Legal Counsel to postpone the signing of any agreement with NATO.[21] Despite some significant diplomatic progress in early 2014 including the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 8 May 2014,[22] AU-NATO relations have been, up to that point, in a state of diplomatic freeze. The political void largely remains. Moreover, the current full title of the AU-NATO Agreement reads: "Agreement between the AUC and NATO on Establishment and Status of a NATO Liaison Office."[23] The first draft submitted by NATO to the AU was entitled "Agreement between the AU and NATO on the Partnership and Status Issues."[24]

Indicative of the lingering political differences between the AU and NATO and also among member states of the AU itself, the AUC was of the opinion that only agreements with the AUC (not the AU, as the sum of its Member States) were with its mandate and binding on the AUC only, while partnership issues may connote political commitments requiring decisions by AU policy organs. The differences over NATO's intervention in Libya highlighted the technical challenges of signing an agreement that would not be confined to privileges and immunities but would necessarily have a diplomatic and political basis.

Diplomatic efforts to close the gap between the AU and NATO

During the Libyan crisis, the then AUC Chairperson Dr Jean Ping met the NAC in Brussels on 5 April 2011. On 31 May 2011, Ping met the Secretary General of NATO and discussed the Libyan crisis and AU-NATO cooperation. In recent times, NATO officials have visited the AUC. In July 2012, a NATO delegation headed by Stephen Evans, the Assistant Secretary General for Operations, met El Gassihm Wane, Director of Peace and Security of the AU in Addis Ababa. In October 2012, another NATO delegation headed by Richard Froh, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Operations, met the AUC Deputy Chairperson, Erastus Mwancha. In September 2013, NATO requested a meeting with the AUC leadership on the margins of the UN General Assembly, but the AU did not agree. On 11-12 February 2014, a NATO delegation headed by Michael Soula planned to meet with the leadership of the AUC and PSOD, as well as with the leadership and officers of the Legal Counsel and Peace and Security Department. By contrast, there had been no high-level AU official visit to NATO for the past three years, until the new Peace and Security Commissioner Mr Smail Chergui met Richard Froh on

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[19] Patrick Goodenough (2012), "South Africa Calls for U.N. Probe into NATO's Libya Mission", 6 January 2012, available from http://cnsnews.com/news/article/south-africa-calls-un-probe-nato-s-libya-mission (accessed on 12 March 2014).

[20] "Mehari Taddele Maru, "Rethinking the North African Uprisings", *African Union Herald*, AU Commission, December 2012, http://www.au.int/SP/auherald/contributors/mehari-taddele-maru (accessed 29 May 2014).

[21] Interviews with AU Commission officials, Key Informant 1, 12 March 2014, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

[22] The African Union signs agreement with NATO, 12 May 2014, available from http://www.norway.org.et/News_and_events/The-African-Union-signs-agreement-with-NATO/#.U4a0FRYzL1o (accessed 29 May 2014).

[23] Interviews with AU Commission officials, Key Informant 1 and Key Informant 2, 5 March 2014; and SMLO, Key Informant 3, 7 March 2014, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

[24] Ibid.

7 February 2014. This visit was diplomatically crucial for the visit by Richard Froh to the AUC and eventual signing of the MoU on 8 May 2014. The AUC continues to request (and obtain) NATO's technical assistance. In early 2014, when a new SMLO assumed rotational duty, NATO approved the extension of the strategic air and maritime lift for current and potential AU missions until January 2015; joint technical planning with Mobile Education and Training Teams (METTs) is scheduled this year, focusing on arrangements for PSOs.

AU and NATO: any shared interests?

With 54 member states (only Morocco is not a member), mandated by the Constitutive Act, the AU is the premier Pan-African governance institution and principal body for maintaining peace and security in Africa. It envisions an "integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa."[25] In line with the UN Charter, and with full respect for the UNSC's mandate on the maintenance of international peace and order, the AU considers itself a regional mechanism under Chapter VIII of that Charter.

With distinct mandates, the AU and NATO also differ in approach. Founded as a pan-African body focusing on threats to human security, the AU − while mandated to deploy peace support operations in a very limited number of cases (war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and other emergencies with implications for regional peace and order) − prioritizes comprehensive socio-economic development as a sustainable solution to most African problems.[26] Thus, while the AU is essentially constituted as a comprehensive multinational body spanning socio-economic as well as governance and security issues, NATO remains fundamentally a political-military alliance focused more narrowly on the collective military defence of its members and international crisis management with partners.[27] NATO's focus and expertise make it relevant to the AU's long-term aspirations, primarily in the area of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) (and, particularly, the ASF and Rapid Deployment Capability).

Overlapping interests: mega-trends in Africa and NATO's exceptional competencies

Consistent with NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept, the recent speech by Secretary General Rasmussen confirmed partnership as one of three priorities for the Alliance, and specifically singled out the AU as an important actor with whom NATO wished to work as a partner.[28] Some observers have proposed a full-fledged specific 'NATO Partnership for Africa', to be included in the existing list of NATO partnerships.[29] But why would NATO want to have the AU as a partner?

The NATO Secretary General's rationale for such a partnership is that "Security today can only be cooperative security. Dialogue and cooperation with partners play an integral part in helping our understanding of world events – and in strengthening international stability and security. And we must now deepen our relationships, and widen our network."[30] He further stated that: "to bolster our global perspective, [we] remain ready to work with partners and protect our values in our region and beyond".[31] Beyond the political differences, a robust Africa-NATO partnership is indispensable, given the geographical proximity of Africa to the NATO members in Southern Europe. Emerging threats such as terrorism, violent extremism, piracy and maritime security, climate change, water and energy and shipping lane security and cyberspace safety threaten members of both AU and NATO. In the perspective of the mega-trends in Africa and elsewhere, AU-NATO cooperation should be based on a common vision for the future and collaboration actions. In this regard, five mega-trends in the AU and NATO shed light on the Africa-NATO partnership's preferred areas of focus: common transnational threats to the peace and security of Africa and NATO allies; judicious use of resources in preventing and managing crises, and capacity building of local intervention mechanisms; shared interests in the security of trade and energy supply lines; the AU's legitimacy and primacy on African peace and security issues; and NATO's unparalleled capabilities in specific areas of interest to the AU.

In recognition of its special capabilities, the UN signed a

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[25] African Union Commission, Strategic Plan 2014-2017, May 2013, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

[26] Ibid. The AU has five pillars: 1) peace and security, 2) social, economic and human development, 3) integration, cooperation and partnership, 4) shared values, and 5) institutions, capacity building and communications.

[27] NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept identifies three core tasks for the Alliance: 1) collective defence, 2) crisis management, 3) cooperative security (partnerships).

[28] See above, note 2.

[29] Paul Pryce, (2012) "Toward a NATO-African Union Partnership: Structuring Future Engagement", *Baltic Security and Defence Review*, Vol. 14, Issue 2.

[30] See above, note 2.

[31] See above, note 2.

cooperation agreement with NATO[32] and many UNSC resolutions call upon NATO to take specific actions.[33] NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept specifically mentions areas of cooperation with the UN in peacekeeping missions, counter-terrorism, combatting piracy, and response to climatic and natural disasters. NATO's support operations in Africa include Darfur (AMIS and UNAIMD) and Somalia (AMISOM). In the Gulf of Aden, the launching of NATO Active Endeavour and Operation Ocean Shield underlines the importance of defending African shores threatened by piracy and maritime insecurity.[34] Indicative of NATO's interest in Africa and non-European regions, JFC-Naples is a successor to NATO's Allied Forces Southern Europe (AFSOUTH) command.[35]

Moreover, prediction of mega-trends indicates that Africa will become increasingly attractive to NATO member states. In a frank admission about the limitations of NATO and the evolving nature of the 21st century's emerging security threats, Secretary General Rasmussen openly stated, "It is no longer sufficient to line up tanks along our borders to patrol and protect them. Today's threats – and tomorrow's – often come from the other side of the world, even from … cyber space. And they come in many forms and guises. To stop terrorism hitting us at home, we must be ready to address it at its source."[36] The peaceful, prosperous and integrated Africa that the AU envisions and is striving to achieve would, in the long term, benefit NATO's member states in many ways. Partnership is also financially beneficial for all concerned. OUP in Libya tested NATO's financial capacity, and to a limited extent its political will. Partner countries of NATO have provided critical financial and other assets for OUP and other NATO operations.[37] Such military interventions by NATO will certainly be more expensive in the future.

By gradually becoming the indispensable interlocutor between international actors interested in partnership on African issues, the AU will certainly be the legitimate partner for NATO in its effort to achieve collaborative global security. After a decade of promoting 'African solutions to African problems', in conceding its failure to operationalize the ASF and to respond on time to the situation in Mali and the CAR (a lapse that compelled France to intervene), the AU has decided to embark on a new 'transitional' arrangement in the form of the ACIRC. While useful in the short term (with limited African self-reliance in peace and security, and no effective African intervention force), these external interventions are in the long term counter-productive. In Africa that provides for its own peace and security would benefit NATO and other AU partners considerably. Limitations in resources, capabilities and experience compel the AU to collaborate with partners. With increasing demands for the AU to address peace and security affairs on the continent, it needs to develop from scratch the enormous capabilities required. Building partnerships to prevent situations like Libya, or to end crises such as those in Somalia, the CAR and Mali, would indirectly require collaborative security with the more efficient expenditure of resources.

Furthermore, partnership brings other advantages such as legitimacy, expertise and access to specialization. Interventions will increasingly require local expertise and popular legitimacy in the regional context, in addition to African and external military, financial and other resources. Thus, NATO and AU have a definite rationale for collaboration. But what does sustainable, effective and efficient partnership require?

The AU: the challenges of managing partnerships with global and regional actors

In the new African economic, peace and security landscape, there are many international actors competing for favourable relations with and within Africa. The list of AU partners includes the EU, the UN, the League of Arab States (LAS), the USA, China, India, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, and South America. Media outlets often describe the negative perceptions of the AU's partnerships with external actors such as NATO or China as 'new colonialism'. These are not necessarily reflective

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[32] The Declaration on UN/NATO Secretariat Cooperation was signed in September 2008. NATO, *NATO and the United Nations*, 25 September 2012, available from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50321.htm (accessed 05 April 2014).

[33] NATO, *NATO and the United Nations*, 25 September 2012, available from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_90148.htm (accessed 25 March 2014).

[34] Ibid.

[35] Rich Rozoff, "Global Energy War: Washington's New Kissinger: The appointment of the US Marine General James Jones", *Global Research,* 2 February 2009, available http://www.globalresearch.ca/global-energy-war-washington-s-new-kissinger/12143 (accessed 21 January 2014).

[36] See above, note 2.

[37] NATO and Libya, *Facts and Figures*, available from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_71652.htm (accessed 26 January 2014).

of African-wide positions and perceptions. The AU already has partnerships, including on peace and security with NATO's main drivers the USA, the UK, Canada, Germany, France, and other European member states, which are also part of the EU. Indeed, many Western values are shared by Africans who yearn to replicate them, particularly in areas such as good governance, the rule of law and the democratic civilian control of the armed forces. The non-traditional eastern economic development path is also a source of inspiration to many Africans.[38] What matters most is how Africans view and engage with international partners from the West and the East, to ensure maximum advantage for Africa. So far, the AU has displayed its will to partner with all those willing and capable of providing assistance while fully respecting the AU mandate. While it is clear that African leadership is politically well prepared to make the most of East-West competition, whether Africa will benefit from these partnerships will depend on the effectiveness of regulatory and enforcement mechanisms at national levels.[39]

Due to the proliferation of partnerships, the increasing challenges in management and the need to ensure policy coherence and direction, the AU recently began overhauling its partnerships with external actors.[40] In a recent decision by the AU Assembly, a minimalist and inclusive approach was adopted. More importantly, the Assembly urged that all partnerships be anchored on priorities involving "concrete projects with earmarked funding" modeled on the Africa-India, Africa-Korea and Africa-China or FOCAC partnerships.[41] The AU has criticized those partnerships that did not deliver concrete actions commensurate with the pledges and promises made. A case in point is the current, disappointing performance of the all Africa-EU partnership.[42] The AU has a Sub-Committee on Multilateral Cooperation (under the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC), composed of all the ambassadors from member states), which oversees all partnerships. The AU PRC steers partnership negotiations, and the Bureau of the Chairperson provides secretarial support.[43] The AUC is assigned to "serve as levers and guarantors of the initiation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of these partnerships, in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the decision-making organs of the continental organization."[44] Consequently, the AUC also established Africa's Strategic Partnerships Division, under the Bureau of the Chairperson.[45] In view of the growing importance, expanding nature, and increasing complexity and responsibility of the partnerships, the AU may consider upgrading the Africa's Strategic Partnerships Division to the level of a department.[46] Accordingly, in the future, the Bureau of the Chairperson will have some oversight over the AU-NATO partnership.

NATO: going global through partnerships

Similarly, and with a view to seeking collaboration, NATO has gone global through the establishment of partnerships. Many former Warsaw Pact members have now joined or are working closely with NATO on commonly shared interests and mutual benefits and responsibilities. Established in 1991 with the aim of offering the former republics of the Soviet Union a cooperation mechanism with NATO, the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (succeeded in 1997 by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council) was successful in achieving its intended aims. Now, after two decades, partnership or collaborative security is a core task of NATO and global in scope with the Alliance declaring in 2010: "We are prepared to develop political dialogue and practical cooperation with any nations and relevant organisations across the

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[38] For detail see Mehari Taddele Maru, 'China-Africa Partnership: Democracy or Delivery? *Aljazeera Report*, Aljazeera Studies Centre, May 2013, available from http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2013/04/201343011415424904.htm (accessed on 26 January 2014).

[39] Ibid.

[40] See AU, AU Decisions on Partnerships, available from http://www.au.int/en/partnerships (accessed 26 January 2014).

[41] Report on the Evaluation of the Global Review of Africa's Strategic Partnerships with other parts of the World, Executive Council, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, January 2012, EX.CL/785(XXIII)IVRev., Pp 9-11.

[42] Mehari Taddele Maru and Emebet Getachew Abate; "Towards Africa-EU Brussels Summit: dialogue and capacity for delivery", *Africa-EU 2014 Blog*, ECPDM, December 2012, available from http://africaeu2014.blogspot.be/2014/01/towards-africa-eu-brussels-summit.html (accessed 26 March 2014).

[43] Ibid.

[44] See above note 42, Pp 11-12;

[45] Decision EX.CL/Dec.646 (XIX), the 19th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council, Malabo, Equatorial Guinea in June 2011; Decision EX.CL/Dec. 670 (XX), the 20th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in January 2012, available from http://www.au.int/en/partnerships (accessed 24 March 2014).

[46] Ibid.

globe that share our interest in peaceful international relations."[47] AU member states, such as Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Mauritania, already have strong partnerships with NATO.[48] Libya may soon join and NATO has signed a host country agreement with Djibouti for its liaison office on maritime security-related operations.[49] Three of these countries – Egypt, Algeria and Libya – are among the five most significant contributors to the AU budget (the other two being South Africa and Nigeria).[50]

Re-defining the level of ambition

By working aggressively on a smaller number of essential shared priorities with anticipated high returns for the efforts made and resources employed, AU-NATO relations could be turned into a natural and mutually complementary partnership, focusing on areas of comparative advantage in which NATO would be uniquely able to help build the AU's capacities. However, this partnership needs to avoid areas that are already sufficiently covered by other partners, such as the EU and the UN, in order to reduce the potential waste of resources by the duplication of efforts and unnecessary competition. In the past decade, the EU has, arguably, become the AU's main partner on peace and security matters, even more so than the UN. The EU meaningfully supported the APSA and AU PSOs – AMISOM, AMIS, and other mediation efforts – essentially through the Africa Peace Facility. What is more, the AU-NATO partnership has had ample opportunity to learn from the failures and successes of other endeavours.

The AUC-NATO MoU[51] generally states that NATO will "provide support to the AU as requested by the AUC, in particular to the development of the AU's peace support capacity." More specifically, the cooperation in short term will focuses on strategic lift, multinational forces interoperability, exercise planning, lessons learned from Peace Support Operations, and experience sharing on peace and security, civilian protection in armed conflicts (children and women).[52] Similarly, the SMMO has apparently emphasized four specific areas for cooperation, namely: 1) strategic airlift and sealift, and logistics; 2) maritime security; 3) operationalization of the ASF; and 4) capacity building and training. Well-placed to provide capacity building in those areas, AU-NATO cooperation may focus on the development of the ASF and, perhaps in the future, on the ACIRC. As NATO operations in Afghanistan wind down, training may progressively become NATO's specialization and unique competence.[53] Africa seems a natural beneficiary for NATO's shift of focus from operations to capacity building in training programmes.

However, in order to avoid loss of capacity due to rotations within the ASF and regional mechanisms, and to ensure higher sustainable impact, the capacity building of the AU may target existing African centres of excellence, recognized and mobilized under the African Peace Support Trainers Association (APSTA).[54] APSTA could also cooperate with the NATO Defense College, the NATO School Oberammergau and other NATO training centres.

With regard to counter-piracy and maritime security operations, cooperation should focus on capacity building within the new 2050 African Union Integrated Maritime (AIM) Strategy. Other areas for non-military capacity building partnerships may include civilian crisis management and response.[55] With its unique experience and capability in civil emergency preparedness and disaster relief operations, NATO could also play a very useful foundational role in the AU's newest initiatives –

[47] See above, note 25.

[48] NATO, *NATO Allies and Partners show unity and resolve on all fronts*, 14-15 April 2011, available from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_72775.htm (accessed 24 March 2014).

[49] NATO, Secretary-General's Annual Report 2013, 27 January 2014, available from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_106247.htm (accessed 27 March 2014).

[50] See above, note 16.

[51] See above, note 21.

[52] NATO and the African Union boost their cooperation, 08 May 2014, available from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-451CB218-8F8F92AB/natolive/news_109824.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 29 May 2014).

[53] See above, note 2.

[54] For details on APSTA follow http://www.apsta-africa.org/index.php/en/ and for NATO Centres of Excellence follow http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_68372.htm (accessed 24 March 2014).

[55] David Yost, 'NATO and International Organizations", *Forum Paper no. 3*, NATO Defense College, September 2007, available from http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/publications/fp_03.pdf (accessed 24 March 2014).

the Africa Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the African Risk Capacity Project. This will increasingly become important as climatic shocks and events will dramatically become frequent and adversely affect human security in Africa.

Eight years after the commencement of AU-NATO cooperation, relations between both organizations should be on firm ground. However, global dynamics and the uncertainties within NATO, in addition to the AU's reservations about NATO's intervention in Libya, the historical baggage of colonialism, public perception and misgivings about NATO's motives, as well as the increasing list of partners, including non-traditional ones such as China and India, make the relationship even more complex. In this regard, there are four gaps that need to be addressed in order to scale up the current *ad hoc* military-focused operational partnership into a robust AU-NATO strategic partnership. These are the *capability, policy, and diplomatic as well as political gaps.*

Capability gap: AU's binding capability constraints

To avoid frustration, partners need to appreciate each other's limitations. The AU's absorption capacity also remains very low. Designed to be the engine of the AU, the AUC absorbs 78% of the budget and 92% of total human resources, and is currently functioning with only 54% of its approved staff complement. It has 1458 staff members, of whom 495 are professional.[56] With 319 professional positions vacant, it employs more than 800 short-term consultants. Its programme performance and budget execution rate, as assessed by the AU Assembly in 2012, remains at a dismal 60%. This conceals a far worse performance in the execution of its programme budget, which stands at a depressingly low 39%. Some departments critical to ensuring human security in the long term are "struggling between execution rates of 15% and 25% budget execution."[57] The main counterpart

of the NATO Secretariat in the AUC is the Peace and Security Department, which has a relatively better absorption capacity. Nonetheless, the AU-NATO partnership needs to consider the capacity limitations of the AUC in pursuing the partnership.

Policy gap: a comprehensive NATO policy on the AU and Africa

Since 2005, the AU has clearly communicated what it wants from NATO, and that accounts for the one-way traffic of previous requests by the AU for assistance. The AU appreciates NATO's technical ability in rapid deployment, in particular its strategic air- and sealift, logistical and communication capabilities. For the AU, as indicated in its requests to NATO, the APSA will be the main area of cooperation.[58] At the centre of the APSA is the ASF, which still remains inoperative, possibly until 2015. The AU aspires to build the ASF on the model of NATO's rapid deployment capabilities.[59] In the near future, the AU may seek NATO's assistance in building the ACIRC, including PSOs, strategic air- and sea lift, and continental logistics[60] and maritime security.[61] Indicative, perhaps, of the Alliance's low level of interest for Africa has been NATO's "wait and see" approach to cooperation with the AU. NATO's interest in Africa is far from clear. Policy-wise, besides its Mediterranean Dialogue (with the North African countries to the south of its borders) and apart from the SMMO, NATO lacks any specifically tailored official strategic policy for cooperation with the AU that takes the regional and historical peculiarities of Africa into account.

In part, this lack of a NATO policy on Africa could be attributable to its deliberate decision to leave few footprints in its operations on the continent and to keep a low profile in its relations with the AU. It may also be the reflection of internal political dynamics and of the divergence among prominent Allies when it comes to

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[56] Department of Human Resources and Administration, AU Commission Data, Addis Ababa, January 2013.

[57] Mehari Taddele Maru "Rethinking and Reforming the Africa Union Commission Elections", *African Security Review*, 21.4, Pp. 64-78, Taylor and Francis Group, ISSN 1024-6029 print / 2154-0128 online, available from http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rjpd20/4/1#/doi/abs/10.1080/15423166.2008.253062245313 (accessed 26 March 2014).

[58] The APSA is comprised of the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the Panel of the Wise (PW), the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the African Standby Force (ASF), the Peace Fund (PF), and the Military Staff Committee (MSC).

[59] Mehari Taddele Maru, *The First Ten Years of the AU and Its Performance in Peace and Security*, No. 218-May 2012, ISPI Policy Brief, available from http://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/PB_218_2012.pdf (accessed 26 March 2014).

[60] AU PSC 387th Meeting, 29 July 2013, Press Statement, PSC/MIN/BR.1(CCCLXXXVII), available from http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/psc-387-com-asf-acirc-29-07-2013.pdf (accessed 26 March 2014).

[61] AU, *2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy*, available from http://pages.au.int/maritime (accessed 26 March 2014).

their policies and interests in Africa.[62] Indeed, doubts about NATO's engagement on the continent come not only from Africa, but from within the Alliance itself. However, while some significant Allies may fear that a robust engagement of the Alliance in Africa could eclipse and diminish their traditional sphere of influence in the continent, most support NATO's limited engagement with the AU. The aforementioned SMMO may have helped to bypass challenging high-level political discussions to define NATO's long-term level of ambition as regards engagement in Africa; nevertheless, the SMMO, as a military-centric, classified document, remains short of exuding confidence in the pan-African community, the regional key countries and the powerful organs of the AU about NATO transparency and intent. The absence of a clear high-level policy endorsed by the NAC adds to the overall misgivings about the involvement of external, particularly Western military powers, in Africa. Perceived mainly as a military mission, the SMLO exacerbates existing public perception about NATO's propensity towards the militarization of the AU. Thus, the absence of a NATO policy on the AU widens the existing political void. A strategic and sustainable partnership requires not only identification of relevant NATO competences for the AU, but also an understanding of Africa's priorities and the AU's limitations. But more vitally, in order to dispel misconceptions and misgivings, an explicit and official articulation of NATO's interests would be a step in the right direction.

The diplomatic gap: SMLO − from a mission in diplomatic limbo to a liaison office

Even without an overarching political vision for the AU-NATO relationship, the Alliance's existing military-technical support team in Addis Ababa until recently faced other challenges of its own. Under the Joint Force Command in Naples (JFC-Naples), since 2009, NATO is currently represented at the AU by the SMLO (at Colonel level). With a deputy, an administrative assistant and subject matter experts (in strategic planning, maritime planning and logistics), SMLO staff members are generally assigned by their respective governments on a rotational basis for six months and remain with the SMLO for a year. The SMLO team, however, was unable to due to the delay in securing an agreement from the AUC in order for the host country, Ethiopia, to grant it legal status and the privileges and immunities accorded to similar international organizations. Some NATO Allies did not directly and actively support the SMLO. Some NATO members demanded an agreement with the AU prior to deploying resources to the SMLO. Consequently, at the time of writing the SMLO has a staff complement of only two, a Turkish Navy Captain and a Dutch officer. With the informal diplomatic support of the Norwegian Embassy in Addis Ababa, the SMLO facilitates NATO's relations with the AU. The MoU was the subject of negotiation between the AUC and the NATO Secretariat for many years now. As previously mentioned, the MoU was approved by the NAC and by AUC and was signed 08 May 2014.[63] A significant improvement and enabler for the technical aspects of AU-NATO cooperation, the diplomatic limbo of SMLO will end once a Host Country Agreement (HCA) with Ethiopia is signed, hopefully with in a couple of months. That said, the signing of the Agreement would not provide the strategic vision called for earlier on, which will only emerge with high-level political dialogue.

Political gap: high-level political dialogue and representation

To understand and accurately describe the current political void and the overall image of NATO in Africa, one needs to take history into consideration. With a historical legacy of external forces that imposed colonialism and exploitation in Africa, Africans justifiably have deep concerns about partners from the Western world with a history of colonialism. The fear is greater with military organizations such as NATO, which includes several former colonial powers, the risk being that this will bring back memories of a bitter historical legacy and a threatening posture. As a result, many Africans perceive NATO with serious misgivings, pervasive feelings of suspicion and widespread distrust. It follows that African officials are uneasy in dealing publically with NATO and its officials. This is symptomatic of the 'institutional image problem' NATO has in Africa. Not solely African, this perception has elsewhere been identified as follows:

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[62] David Yost, 'NATO and International Organizations", *Forum Paper no. 3*, NATO Defense College, September 2007, available from http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/publications/fp_03.pdf (accessed 2 March 2014).

[63] Interviews with AU Commission officials, Key Informant 1 and Key Informant 2, 5th March 2014; and SMLO, Key Informant 3, 7th March 2014, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

"The idea of NATO being a military tool-box might work in a political sense but without the traditional, built-in emphasis on the Alliance stature as a community of values, its political legitimacy will erode."[64]

While the signing of MoU constitutes significant progress in itself, technical cooperation alone will be inadequate to fill the political void. Progress on the signing of the MoU by the AU came about through a political dialogue that was initiated by the repeated visits from NATO to the AUC, and the recent visit by the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security. This current momentum must be maintained built upon by instituting regular high-level political dialogue to clearly articulate mutually shared levels of ambition and the strategic areas of partnership. For instance, cooperation on fighting piracy, including the prosecution and imprisonment of pirates, would justify collaborative political guidance from high-level decision-making bodies of the AU and NATO.[65] The general partnership policies of the AU and NATO dictate this strategic approach. Characterized by flexibility that takes regional peculiarities and the contextual diversities of each partner into account, NATO's 'Berlin partnership package' promotes a demand-driven supply of capacity building and partnerships. At the same time, its application requires the articulation of the AU and NATO's shared interests and the strategic goals of the partnership, strategic priority areas and an action plan of activities to be implemented under the partnership.[66]

Even though political, institutional and legal arrangements would not have altered the course of the Libyan crisis,[67] one could also argue that such political dialogue and institutional arrangements could have facilitated the exchange of ideas and mutual respect between NATO and the AU. The AU-EU Partnership did not bridge differences over Libya, but the arrangement allowed for high-level political exchanges, and the partnership was not significantly affected.

The former Malawi Permanent Representative to the AU, addressing a May 2012 conference on AU-NATO relations in Addis Ababa, stated: "Strong relationships, however, happen by design. In this case there are still critical issues that have to be addressed. The first is that any lasting collaboration between NATO and the AU has to be a result of a political decision."[68] A long-term partnership should begin with a confidence-building dialogue that is frank, transparent and inclusive of all AU and NATO bodies, as well as the member states of both organizations. Dialogue needs to be based on mutual respect and equality, not donor-recipient subordination, with one partner questioning and the other responding. Both partners need to raise questions and provide answers. Any future AU-NATO partnership needs permanent consultative mechanisms at political and technical levels, where converging interests could be forged, and diverging points of view addressed.

Current ad hoc military technical cooperation needs to be transformed into a long-term, effective and strategic partnership. Full partnership would require political level engagement with the AUC, the PRC and the PSC. In order to encourage political will from both sides, dialogue should be initiated, probably at NAC and PSC levels.[69] This would allow for meetings to be held at ambassadorial, ministerial or heads of state or government level, as deemed necessary. The AU's PRC, through its Sub-Committee on Multilateral Corporation[70] and NATO's Political and Partnerships Committee (PPC),[71] could provide regular guidance. At the secretariat-to-secretariat level, the NATO International Staff and the AUC could also establish a Joint Taskforce similar to the AU-UN taskforce.[72]

[64] Heidi Reisinger, "Rearranging Family Life, and a Larger Circle of Friends: Reforming NATO's Partnership Programmes", *Research Paper, no. 72*, NATO Defense College, January 2012, pp. 7-8, (accessed 24 January 2014).

[65] Report of 2011 NATO Legal Conference on "Partners, Cooperation and *Ad Hoc* Relations", 24-27 October 2011, The Hotel Riviera, Carcavelos, Portugal, available from http://www.aco.nato.int/resources/3/Events/2012/Legal/2011%20NATO%20Legal%20Conference%20Report-%20Final%209%20Feb.pdf (accessed 26 January 2014).

[6] See above, note 64.

[67] See Adesoji Adeniyi, "Paternalism or Partnership? The AU-NATO Relationship and the Libyan Crisis: Implications for Security Governance in Africa", in Brooke A. Smith-Windsor (ed.), *AU-NATO Collaboration: Implications and Prospects, Forum Paper no. 22*, NATO Defense College Rome, 2013.

[68] Dr Mbuya Isaac G. Munlo, "Foreword", in Brooke A. Smith-Windsor (ed.), *AU-NATO Collaboration: Implications and Prospects, Forum Paper no. 22*, NATO Defense College Rome, 2013.

[69] Similar arrangements exist in AU's partnership with EU at Heads of State level, Ministerial, Commission to Commission, and with the UN even if informally at council to council and joint task force of AUC and UN Secretariat. Article 17 of the AU PSC Protocol supports such dialogue and engagement with other international and regional mechanisms.

[70] NATO, *Political and Partnerships Committee*, available from http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_79430.htm (accessed 26 January 2014); see above, note 41.

[71] Ibid.

Beyond technical dialogue, such a partnership needs to be supported by institutional mechanisms, including at political, diplomatic and technical levels by NATO representation in Addis Ababa and the AU mission in Brussels. Regarding the latter, the existing diplomatic position of the SMLO at the rank of Colonel OF-5 falls short of ensuring access to the AU Chairperson's office, individual African missions or the Host Country. Furthermore, the short-term mandates of the SMLO staff result in its inability to establish and maintain sustainable relations with the pan-African community in Addis Ababa, which requires time for confidence building.

Suggested AU-NATO institutional dialogue interface

In Brussels' view, Addis Ababa's dual role as Ethiopia's

capital and Africa's diplomatic hub means that NATO's Addis-based representation office will have a twofold mission: to serve as the interface of the Alliance with the AU and the pan-African community at large, and to support the AU's institutional development, both at the continental and sub-regional levels. As mentioned earlier, NATO will be required to liaise not only with the AUC and its leadership, but also with the other key bodies of the AU to encompass a wide range of pan-African organizations, such as the PRC, PSC and Ministerial Conferences. A higher permanent representation to the AU, which could be construed as evidence of the seriousness of NATO's commitment to the partnership and in addition, would contribute to making the partnership more effective.

A liaison office headed by an official of higher military or diplomatic rank would give fresh impetus to joint consultations, facilitate the identification of priorities and ease communications with the AUC, through access to, and regular consultative meetings with, Commissioners and the officials of relevant AUC departments. Such an office would also help in identifying problems, evaluate their potential impact on the AU-NATO partnership, and report accordingly. NATO needs to upgrade the SMLO into a permanent mission to the AU at the rank of Ambassador or Special Representative, similar to the EU delegation to the AU or the UN Office to the AU.

Conclusions and recommendations: towards a strategic partnership

With NATO's recent statements of priorities, and repeated AU requests for assistance, both organizations have signaled a need to deepen their partnership. Clearly, no organization or country can meet the 21st century challenges of peace and security alone. The origins and the complex nature of threats often require local responses backed by international support. Legitimacy, efficacy, efficiency and sustainability demand responses endorsed by local communities. Thus, the AU-NATO partnership needs to be anchored in the UN Charter and the UNSC mandate − and more specifically Chapter VIII, on the role of regional mechanisms. Moreover, the ultimate aim of the partnership needs to be self-reliance, based on enhancement of AU capacity to provide peace and security for Africa by itself. It needs to avoid 'capacity substitution' and 'aid addiction'.

What is more, NATO will have difficulty in maintaining a low profile or 'small footprint' strategy in Africa. With the signing of AU and NATO MoU, both organizations must seize this historic opportunity to forge political dialogue and articulate a partnership policy encompassing longer-term engagement and investment. In addition to enhanced and comprehensive mutual understanding, dialogue will reinforce the partnership and establish a rules-based direct approach to addressing differences. Hence, the centrepiece of the start-up phase is the launch of an initiative for high-level political consultations and dialogue: this is not only the most urgent of tasks, but also the most consequential for the partnership.

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[72] Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on the Partnership between the African Union and the United Nations on Peace and Security, *Towards Greater Strategic and Political Coherence,* PSC 307th Meeting, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 9 January 2012, PSC/PR/2 (CCCVII).