

Panel 41: Conflict and Conflict Management as Decisive Factors in Modern Africa

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Title: The Development of African Conflict Management since 1963

Abstract:

Institutionalized conflict management within the African Organization for Unity (OAU) never worked. The African Heads of State and Government ignored the concept in favor of the principles of the organization: sovereignty and non-interference. These practices shaped the postcolonial history of Africa and continue to do so.

The paper has to be seen in connection with an actual research project focusing on the conflict management of the OAU which has been established in 1963. It is not so much the purpose of the project to retrace the development of the normative concept on the basis of the existing documents. The aim of the project rather is to explain why this tool for conflict management has failed in spite of its numerous and laborious reforms. First of all internal political circumstances/facts are the reason for this failure. Though external influencing factors always played an enormous part in African conflicts, too, they cannot be held responsible for the failure of the self-fixed standards aiming to regulate these conflicts. The analysis of this failure uncovers factors which actually also influence the present security concept of the African Union (AU) in a very negative way – a concept for which the European Union – among others – also contributes to optimize its effectiveness and structure.

Paper:

“For young African States, who are in great need of capital for internal development, it is ridiculous – indeed suicidal – for each state separately and individually to assume such a heavy burden of self-defence, when the weight of this burden could be easily lightened by sharing it among themselves.” (Nkrumah 1998: 220)

Against the background of the Rwandan Genocide 1994 François Mitterand’s advisor in African affairs, Bruno Delaye, declared to human rights organisations’ representatives that these *tribal feuds* and atrocities were regrettable, but that that was how Africans are (des Forges 2002: 775f). This indifference beyond all cynicism towards African tragedies seems to be widespread in the *developed North*. As a matter of fact, post-colonial African history features numerous conflicts, including humanitarian catastrophes such as those in Biafra (1967–1970) and Rwanda (1994), causing a death toll of millions. Is that normality in Africa? Hardly!

African heads of state and government were aware of the far-reaching consequences of (violent) conflicts¹. In 1991, in the *Kampala Document* on reorganisation of the security agenda, they stated: *“The erosion of security and stability in Africa is one of the major causes of its continuing crisis and one of the principal impediments to the creation of a sound economy and effective intra and inter-African co-operation”* (OAU 1991: Article III). About

¹ Conflicts are defined as the clashing of interests (positional differences) over national values of some duration and magnitude between at least two parties (organized groups, states, groups of states, organizations) that are determined to pursue their interests and achieve their goals (HIIK 2010: 88)

ten years later, when the Organization for African Unity (OAU) was replaced by the African Union (AU), the Preamble of the AU Constitutive also addressed this problem: “*Conscious of the fact that the scourge of conflicts in Africa constitutes a major impediment to the socio-economic development of the continent and of the need to promote peace, security and stability as a prerequisite for the implementation of our development and integration agenda*” (OAU 2000: Preamble). In 2002, at the first ordinary AU summit, the heads of state and government resolved to establish an African Union Peace and Security Council in which the security agendas are concentrated since then (AU 2002).

Nevertheless, thoughts about joint African conflict management started earlier, years before the establishment of the OAU. At the First Conference of Independent African States (CIAS) the heads of state and government of the eight states attending² passed a (still very vague) resolution on this topic making reference to direct negotiations among conflicting parties (meaning exclusively states) (CIAS 1958: Resolution 5). Soon, however, another topic dominated the joint agenda of the heads of state, i.e. the matter of African integration. A group of heads of state and government including the Prime Minister and later President of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, declared to be in favour of political union. Opponents of the union concept, however, wanted African integration to be limited to a confederation while maintaining full sovereignty of the individual states for the time being.³ While Nkrumah argued for union with the menace of Balkanization and neo-colonization of weak states (Nkrumah 1998: 173ff), the then Governor-General and later President of Nigeria, Nnamdi Azikiwe, summed up the confederalists’ misgivings:

“It would be capital folly to assume that hard-bargaining politicians who passed through the ordeal of victimization and the crucible of persecution to win their political independence will easily surrender their newly-won political power in the interest of a political leviathan which is populated by people who axe alien to one another in their social and economic relations.” (Azikiwe 1961: 72)

Later resolutions by the confederalists⁴ included concrete ideas for joint conflict management (Monrovia 1961: Resolution on the settlement of conflicts which may arise between African states; Lagos 1962: Chapter VIII Pacific Settlement of Disputes). When the African heads of state and government agreed on the OAU Charter in 1963 it had been drafted by a confederalist. The principles defined in it included sovereignty, non-interference and territorial integrity. Article XIX of the Charter stipulated the establishment of a Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration (CMCA) (OAU 1963), with the relevant protocol being approved in 1964 (OAU 1964a). In 1993 this Commission was replaced by a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (MCPMR, OAU 1993b) before in 2002 the heads of state and government rearranged the security matters in the AU (AU 2002; Klingebiel 2005).

Thus the states of Africa look back on about 50 years of history of joint, institutionalised conflict management whose framework was adapted time and again throughout the years. Nevertheless they were unable to mitigate catastrophes such as those in

² Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia and United Arab Republic.

³ Differences between these groups went beyond the matters of integration and were marked by claims to power, ideology or personal animosities among heads of state and government.

⁴ The group was called the Brazzaville Group after its first venue in 1960. In 1962 it was expanded to the Monrovia Group which went by the name Inter-African and Malagasy Organisation (IAMO) from 1962 on.

Biafra or Rwanda – let alone to avoid them. The institutions provided for could not cope with the challenges put before them; success was mainly achieved off institutionalised paths. Different organisational principles interfered with each other, with peaceful settlement of conflicts certainly having to give way to respect for sovereignty, non-interference or territorial integrity. Tanzania's President Julius Nyerere put the dilemma in a nutshell during the Biafra crisis when he blamed his colleagues of being "*callously watching the massacre of tens of thousands of people for the sake of upholding territorial integrity of Nigeria*" (Azikiwe 1969: 6f).

In 1993, Salim Ahmed Salim, OAU Secretary General from 1989 until 2001, lamented: "*The story of conflicts in Africa is a story of death, hunger, starvation, forced migration, destruction of property and wasted resources.*" (OAU 1993a: 3) By then, institutionalised conflict management within the OAU had been in existence for 29 years. In fact the CMCA had not been entrusted a single case in that phase! Conflict management did not take place within the OAU institution established for that purpose. When the MCPMR was established in 1993, Salim saw it as a "*clear signal that Africa can no longer afford to hesitate politically or to suffer institutional deficiency which have hamstrung numerous attempts to deal with conflicts in the past.*" (OAU 1993c: 3) The MCPMR's track record was no success story either. The new OAU institution was unable to defuse conflicts such as the Rwanda Genocide, the conflict system at the Horn of Africa, that in the African Great Lakes region or the Angolan Civil War, to name but a few examples. The only successful action took place in Burundi.

The here introduced project shall analyse why African conflict management failed. For this analysis, a clear distinction between conflicts and conflict management has to be made. When studying single conflicts or conflict systems in terms of root, trigger and tertiary causes it becomes obvious that (in nearly all cases), apart from internal, historic and structural factors, exogenous interests are important, with these motives being assessed differently (Collier/Hoeffler 1998; Cramer 2002; Jacoby 2008; Berdal/Malone 2000, Young 2002). Due to networking and interdependence of conflict factors at regional and/or global level (Gebrewold 2009), non-African *players* (institutions, groups, individuals) are also involved. OAU conflict management, however, is a genuinely African regime, elaborated and implemented by its supreme body, the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government itself (Elias 1966; Salim 1996: 103f). No exogenous factors contributed to the failed implementation.

For the analysis of African conflict management, the period studied is split into three phases: 1.) the years before establishment of the OAU in 1963, 2.) the period of the Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration 1964–1992 and 3.) the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution from 1993 up to the creation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) within the framework of the AU from 2002 on. In an additional section, the AU conflict management shall be analysed in terms of the *problems identified* in the phases 2 and 3 as well as *lessons learnt*, if any.

Therefore two complementary strands of analysis will be followed: On the one hand the genesis and development of institutionalised conflict management which could not develop its normative character and on the other hand improvised and informal conflict management primarily resorted to in order to avoid the institutionalised path via CMCA and MCPMR respectively.

The quest for reasons of the failure of African conflict management shall thus concentrate on the gap between norm and reality. It has to be analysed why African heads of state and government preferred free improvisation by mediation and *good services* over the institutionalised procedure established by themselves. Peter Onu, Acting Secretary-General of the OAU from 1983 until 1985, commented on this problem:

“The generally uncoordinated manner where a Head of State or group of Heads of State offer their good offices to mediate disputes cannot work efficiently in a continent where conflicts are many and becoming intractable. Where Heads of State have mediated, they were usually self-appointed and it is only after their involvement that they report to the OAU. Even where Ad-hoc Commissions were appointed by the OAU, they rarely operated at the level of Heads of State and government thus robbing the Commissions of their importance.” (OAU 1993d: 2)

The aim of this project is to trace the development of this gap throughout the three phases of the period studied. It is not meant to be a chronology of conflicts nor a description of the methods of conflict management applied in each case (which failed in many). The study shall centre at first on the genesis of the OAU principles in the context of Africa's split into factions during the struggle for integration until 1963 (phase 1). An analysis of the motives that led to avoidance of institutionalised conflict management (phase 2) or to non-exhaustion of its possibilities (phase 3) is bound to follow.

According to the two aforementioned strands of analysis on the one hand the entire development of institutionalised conflict management shall be presented with a comprehensive documentary section, while simultaneously on the other hand the actual way of dealing with conflicts, which led to failure of conflict management procedures adopted by the heads of state and government within the OAU Assembly, shall be traced.

This shall lead to a comprehensive history of African conflict management that explains the reasons of its failure both with the difficult start of African integration and as a consequence of bad governance by the heads of state and government in charge. The longitudinal section of the history of institutionalised and applied conflict management shall subsequently allow a more exact definition of the difficulties within the African Peace and Security Architecture.

In order to achieve this goal the analysis is based on the central hypothesis:

The failure of African conflict management is mainly self-inflicted. The African heads of state and government as the last instance within the OAU were not willing to raise institutionalised conflict management above their particular interests. This behaviour was due to distrust towards their own organisation and concerns about the limitation of full national sovereignty by accepting a superior OAU regime. Non-committal political solutions achieved by ad-hoc mediation were preferred over binding resolutions of an OAU body.

Abbreviations:

APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
AU	African Union
CIAS	Conference of Independent African States
CMCA	Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration
HIK	Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (Heidelberger Institut für Internationale Konfliktforschung)
MCPMR	Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution
OAU	Organization of African Unity

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