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**Africa Symposium 2020: Advancing
Africa's Peace, Security, and
Governance—Summary**

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Africa Symposium 2020: Advancing Africa's Peace, Security, and Governance

Introduction

In 2020, Africa celebrates some significant milestones. This year represents 20 years since Africa's regional and continental institutions adopted the principle of non-indifference, paving the way for African states to intervene in cases of political and military instability. It also marks 30 years since Africa's states began to adopt principles of democratic governance. To facilitate a forward-looking conversation on Africa's peace, security, and governance, the Institute for Defense Analyses and the Woodrow Wilson Center Africa Program jointly organized *Africa Symposium 2020: Advancing Africa's Peace, Security, and Governance* on March 11, 2020, at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

The symposium invited leading scholars and practitioners to discuss Africa's democratic dividend, conflict-management reforms in Africa, women and youth as stakeholders in the continent's peace and security, and Africa's external stakeholders. In addition, senior members of the U.S. government were asked to comment on Africa's role in the U.S. National Defense Strategy. Ms. Whitney Baird (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for West Africa and Security Affairs), Mr. Pete Marocco (Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs), and Ms. Magdalena Bajll (National Intelligence Manager for Africa) provided their unique insights. Major General Christopher Craige, Director of Strategy, Plans, and Programs at the U.S. Africa Command, delivered the keynote address. U.S. government officials affirmed the U.S. government's commitment to Africa's security. Major General Craige emphasized the U.S. objective to partner for success, demonstrate its commitment to build African partner nations' capacity, create space for good governance, and disrupt networks of malign influences. This summary highlights the major points of the four panels featured at the Africa symposium.

Africa's Democratic Dividend

Professor E. Gyimah-Boadi, founder and CEO of Afrobarometer, and Professor Jaimie Bleck, of Notre Dame University, led the discussion on the achievements and challenges facing Africa's democratic institutions. Acknowledging that multiparty elections are the norm across Africa—sustained by civil society, opposition parties, and media—they noted that survey results from Afrobarometer indicate a dissatisfaction with the amount of democracy among many citizens. Democracy in some countries, like Ghana, Botswana, and Malawi, is thriving, but there have been dramatic slides in Benin, Guinea, Zambia, and Tanzania, among others.

Moreover, survey results from Afrobarometer reveal that citizens rate their nations' democratic institutions highly when economic opportunities increase, the quality of elections improve, and corruption reduces. Survey results in Mali obtained by fieldwork conducted by Bleck similarly showed that multiparty elections alone were insufficient to build state capacity to affect the rule of law, protect citizens, and provide services. To citizens in Mali, the state is weak and ineffective. Many feel unprotected by the state, and the youth do not feel engaged or optimistic about the future. To reap the promises of democracy, national and international bodies should focus on engaging youth and creating sustainable opportunities.

Conflict Management and Reforms

In 2000, the African Union's (AU) Constitutive Act took the extraordinary step of allowing member states to intervene in cases of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. The continental body shifted from a policy of non-interference to one of non-indifference. In practice, this has resulted in African states intervening in conflicts, contributing peacekeepers, and deploying peace-support operations. Led by Professor Paul Williams of The George Washington University, the panel pointed out that while the AU has made tremendous strides, it still suffers from capacity, financial, and technical challenges. Notably, fewer than 30 of the AU's 55 member states have paid dues, while 5 member states have not paid at all—leading the body to launch initiatives on financial reforms to increase the support by member states and reduce dependence on outside partners. Equally challenging, the AU must also address the changing nature of responses to conflict: many states are coming together ad hoc, rather than through established regional organizations and protocols.

Stakeholders in Africa's Peace and Security: Women and Youth

Women and youth are increasingly considered critical to sustaining peace and security in Africa. Panelists Sandra Pepera, Director for Gender, Women, and Democracy at the National Democratic Institute, and Marc Sommers, an internationally recognized expert on youth and conflict in Africa, emphasized strong linkages between including women and youth, realizing democratic dividends, and peace. Pepera highlighted research demonstrating that women's inclusion leads to more peace agreements and more sustainable peace. Women's value to peacebuilding lies in their tendency to work across boundaries, faith groups, and ethnicities. Similarly, while societies stereotype youth—males especially—as violent, Sommers noted that the overwhelming majority of youth do not join armed groups. Violent extremist organizations counter these realities with gender-specific recruitment strategies—such as by appealing to male youths' fears of emasculation, and fears of failed adulthood, and, sometimes, anger at the state.

Youth are often subjected to violence by the state, violence against women is common, and both groups remain excluded from democratic processes and are denied a voice. In fact, Pepera argued, violence against women reflects a society's more generalized violence.

Sommers advised that governments must rethink how they approach youth—they should consider providing them with a voice and engaging them more actively. Citing Georgetown University’s Women, Peace, and Security Index, Pepera noted that higher gross domestic product does not translate into less violence against women. Rather, other factors, in particular commitment and political will, are critical to reducing violence against women.

Africa’s Evolving External Stakeholders

In the last decade, engagement between Africa and the rest of the world has expanded considerably. Judd Devermont, Africa Director at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and Lina Benabdallah, Wake Forest University political science professor, led the panel discussion on the increasing number of external stakeholders vying for a foothold on the continent. From 2010 to 2015, at least 150 new embassies were built in Africa, and trade and investment have been steadily on the rise over the past decade. In contrast, U.S. engagement is at its lowest level since the Eisenhower administration—only two African heads of states have been accorded state visits under President Donald Trump. China’s engagement with Africa on trade and political relations is the continent’s most significant. In addition to providing a large market for trade, Africa contributes to China’s foreign policy objectives, providing a solid voting block in the UN and reliable support for other endeavors requiring diplomatic support. As a result, Africa legitimizes China as a responsible global player. Still, Benabdallah argued that while China has built strong relationships with African governments, its investments in Africa’s human capital are equally important. China has cultivated a positive reputation by offering scholarships and opportunities to African citizens and training to military personnel. Moreover, the initiatives have been ongoing; for example, the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation has taken place regularly every 3 years since 2000.

Conclusions

Africa Symposium 2020 highlighted the continent’s advancements in establishing democratic institutions, conflict-management mechanisms, and increasingly significant role in the global community. Yet, critical challenges remain in increasing institutional capacities to address conflict and integrating important stakeholders to advance peace, security, and democracy. A cross-cutting message centered on more robust engagement of citizens—in particular, youth—by national governments and international bodies to provide sustainable opportunities and robust engagement, in a bid to increase support for democratic norms and discourage the growth of violent extremist organizations.

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