



# A Tale of Two Councils: Strengthening AU-UN Cooperation

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## *Executive Summary*

Since the start of 2019, long-time tensions between the UN Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) over the handling of African crises have broken into the open, as evidenced by friction around how to address this year's political turmoil in Sudan and the upsurge of violence in Libya. The catalyst of the intensified disagreements was a December 2018 dispute over the proposed use of UN-assessed contributions to fund AU-led peace operations. But there are deeper, longer-term dynamics at work, undermining both councils from within and sharpening debates about which institution should have primacy in pursuit of their common mission. The councils cannot immediately overcome some of these challenges, but both can take practical steps to lower tensions, increase cooperation and modestly improve prospects for reducing conflict on the continent.

Forces undermining the two councils from within also make each less reliable in its engagement with the other. On the one hand, splits among the Security Council's five veto-wielding permanent members (China, France, Russia, the UK and the U.S. – also known as the P5) regarding conflict situations such as Syria and Ukraine are infecting deliberations on African conflicts at the same time as competition is rising among these countries for influence on the continent. On the other hand, AU leaders' and senior officials' increasing marginalisation of the PSC is denting that institution's confidence and is undermining its credibility as a voice for continental affairs – with the Security Council.

The two councils must also struggle with time-worn questions about which body ultimately has the lead when it comes to peace and security on the continent. The AU and its member states tend to believe that there must be African solutions for African problems – a logic that would privilege the PSC's positions on African crises when they come before the Security Council. But the Security Council's permanent members, especially France, the UK and the U.S. (the P3), jealously guard the Council's role under the UN Charter as the principal protector of global peace and security. The AU often interprets the lack of deference to PSC positions as arrogance, which can undermine the perceived legitimacy of Security Council decisions. To the extent that disconnects between the councils reflect a lack of African support for decisions emanating from New York, they can also be a harbinger of failure. Without regional cooperation, it is hard – if not impossible – for UN efforts to succeed.

But while many of these challenges run very deep, there are some irritants to inter-council relations that might be more readily and productively addressed. For example, annual consultations and possible joint visits to Africa, which should foster greater understanding and cooperation, too often have the opposite effect; New York delegations behave in ways that come off as high-handed and non-inclusive, reinforcing the PSC's impression that the Security Council views it as a junior partner.

For its part, the PSC's failure to consistently lay out clear and timely positions on issues on the Security Council's agenda weakens its influence, as do persistent challenges in coordinating its views with those of the three rotating African participants on the Security Council (A3). The PSC generally takes the view that the A3 should represent its views in New York. In reality, however, their role vis-à-vis the AU is com-

plicated by both AU and UN politics. The PSC's protocols mean that the A3 states are not invited to attend the PSC's closed consultations (unless they sit on both councils simultaneously) and therefore have no input into the decisions they are meant to advocate. Meanwhile, the A3 are targets of heavy political lobbying at the UN, especially by the P5. Historical ties also matter. Côte d'Ivoire has, for example, sometimes sided with France rather than other A3 members during its term.

Resolving the core issues that aggravate inter-council relations may be beyond immediate reach. But addressing some procedural irritants and focusing on practical improvements offers the potential for some progress. Among other things, the PSC could improve its ability to influence Security Council deliberations and decisions by discussing conflicts well in advance of key Council meetings and mandate renewals. To ensure that agendas are better aligned, the PSC chairperson and Security Council president (which rotate on a monthly basis) could meet long before their terms to begin jointly defining areas of interest. The councils could plan more frequent and better-prepared direct engagements to promote mutual understanding. And the PSC could improve communication and coordination with the A3 – both by inviting them to participate in its deliberations and giving them clear negotiation mandates.

But none of these proposals will make much difference if Security Council members do not take greater notice of the AU's views. Simple steps, such as echoing the language of PSC decisions in Council resolutions, could demonstrate increased sensitivity to AU positions. Far from diminishing the Security Council's status under the UN Charter, these initiatives could instead help it increase regional support for its efforts and make it more effective in serving its paramount goal of ending deadly conflict.

**Addis Ababa/New York/Brussels, 25 June 2019**

# A Tale of Two Councils: Strengthening AU-UN Cooperation

## I. Introduction

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Since the African Union's (AU) founding in 2002, it has cooperated closely with the UN to tackle the continent's multiple and multiplying conflicts. Political frictions between the two organisations have sometimes threatened to undermine their collaboration, but overall the relationship's evolution has been remarkable. After initial faltering efforts at joint crisis management in the mid-2000s during the Darfur civil war, the two organisations' secretariats and field missions came to cooperate almost as a matter of routine. They have worked together on challenges ranging from military operations in Somalia, where UN logisticians back up AU troops, to mediation in countries including Guinea and Burkina Faso. This level of cooperation has allowed the two institutions to tackle crises in ways that neither could manage individually. In Somalia, for example, AU troops have undertaken offensive operations against jihadist forces – made possible by UN technical assistance – involving risks and casualty levels that a UN mission would not accept.<sup>1</sup>

UN Secretary-General António Guterres and AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat have made deepening this partnership a common priority.<sup>2</sup> But the two organisations' main political organs – the UN Security Council and AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) – still often fail to coordinate their positions during major crises for a mix of political and procedural reasons. Tensions between the Security Council's three African members (A3) and five permanent members (P5) have exacerbated the differences. One particularly important source of ill will relates to the Security Council's failure to agree to a December 2018 proposal, tabled by its African members, and with PSC backing, that would have provided for the use of UN-assessed contributions to fund 75 per cent of AU-led peace operations.<sup>3</sup> Versions of this proposal have been circulating since 2008.

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<sup>1</sup> UNSOM's mandate includes the provision of policy advice and assistance to the Somali Federal Government and the AU Mission Somalia (AMISOM) on peacebuilding and state-building. "Mandate for United Nations Assistance Mission Somalia", UNSOM, 2019. Since 2007, the European Union has provided more than €1.6 billion to AMISOM, 85 per cent of which was dedicated to troop allowances and reimbursements of troop-related costs. "African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)", The Africa-EU Partnership, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> "Secretary-General's remarks at the 32nd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union", statement, UN, 10 February 2019; AUC Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat, speech to UN Security Council open debate on "Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and sub-regional organizations in maintaining international peace and security", New York, 6 December 2018.

<sup>3</sup> The proposal has a long history. In January 2007, the AU called on the UN to examine the possibility of funding AU-led peacekeeping operations through assessed contributions. This led to the December 2008 Prodi report – produced by a joint AU-UN panel and led by former Italian prime minister, Romano Prodi – which recommended approving the use of UN-assessed contributions to support UN-authorized AU peacekeeping operations for up to six months on a case-by-case basis and only when the UN was to take over the mission's management within six months. The admin-

Whatever the proposal's merits, the African delegations and the AU felt that the U.S., which threatened to veto it (ostensibly due to human rights concerns but likely also out of financial considerations), and France, which helped craft an alternative resolution that split the A3, were disrespectful in their handling of the matter.<sup>4</sup> The resulting spat left both sides angry, and discussions between African and American diplomats on peacekeeping have consequently been spiteful throughout the first half of 2019.<sup>5</sup> In the same period, there have been frictions within and between the two councils over how to deal with the war in Libya and political transition in Sudan.

The growing distance between the PSC and the Security Council serves neither body and inhibits each in its efforts to advance peace and security in Africa. This report explores the roots of this trend. It then recommends a series of modest steps that could – especially if backed by the powerful states that wield most influence in each council – help arrest and reverse it. The report is based primarily on Crisis Group interviews with diplomats and AU and UN officials in Addis Ababa and New York conducted between September 2018 and June 2019.

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istration of President Barack Obama championed the idea of UN funding, leading to an AU proposal whereby Addis would finance 25 per cent of its peace and security activities, and its international partners – including the UN – would cover the remaining 75 per cent. The AU took steps toward this end, proposing a levy to generate funds and establishing the African Continental Free Trade Agreement – which aims to create a single African market with free movement and a currency union – to make this levy a possibility. “Decision on the Report of Alternative Sources of Financing the African Union”, AU, Assembly/AU/Dec.561(XXIV), 31 January 2015. But with President Donald Trump’s administration looking to reduce its contributions to the UN, American support for the use of UN-assessed contributions has diminished. “Working together for peace and security in Africa: The Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council”, *Security Council Report*, 10 May 2011; and “Report of the African Union-United Nations panel on modalities for support to African Union peacekeeping operations”, UN S/2008/813, 31 December 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Crisis Group interviews, African diplomat and senior AU official, Addis Ababa, 14 March 2019. For more, see “Vote on draft resolution on the financing of AU peace support operations”, *What’s in Blue*, 18 December 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Crisis Group interviews, diplomats working on peacekeeping, New York, March 2019. The question of using UN-assessed contributions for African-led peace operations is one of the most important and contentious issues dividing the two councils. This report will address this question only briefly, as a forthcoming Crisis Group publication will tackle the debate in greater depth.

## **II. Primacy, Legitimacy and Inter-council Cooperation**

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The Security Council-PSC relationship has long been marked by competition for primacy. The Security Council was keen to engage with the PSC after its founding in 2002, and AU officials look back at that early period fondly.<sup>6</sup> But UN ambassadors were also wary from the start about compromising the Security Council's status as the chief international forum for discussions of peace and security.<sup>7</sup> Conversely, members of the nascent PSC believed that their institutional mission was to develop African-led solutions to African crises, especially given the period of great power withdrawal from continental affairs that followed the death of U.S. soldiers in Somalia in 1993 and the UN's failure to address the Rwandan genocide in 1994.<sup>8</sup>

Over time Africans recognised that the PSC could not go it alone, especially on crises with implications beyond the continent, but they continued to expect other institutions to defer to them on African peace and security matters. The Security Council did not always agree, and efforts to assert primacy led to tortuous negotiations over the two bodies' relative importance, culminating in a furious row at the councils' 2009 joint meeting in Addis Ababa that almost led their dialogue to collapse.<sup>9</sup>

While the two councils resolved that quarrel, questions about primacy and deference persist. Many PSC members continue to feel that the Security Council should defer to the AU's positions on African crises.<sup>10</sup> The Security Council does sometimes follow the region's lead. For example, the Council offered broad backing for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and AU efforts to resolve the 2017 Gambian post-electoral crisis – a situation that both UN and African officials cite as a case study of successful crisis management.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Crisis Group interview, AU official, Addis Ababa, 15 March 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, New York, 19 December 2018. For more, see "Working together for peace and security in Africa: The Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council", *Security Council Report*, op. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Dave Peterson, "Finding African Solutions to African Problems", *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 21, issue 3 (1998), pp. 149-158; Terry M. Mays, "African Solutions for African Problems: The Changing Face of African-Mandated Peace Operations", *The Journal of Conflict Studies*, vol. 23, no. 1 (Spring 2003), pp. 106-123; and Amadu Sesay, "The Limits of Peace-Keeping by a Regional Organization: The OAU Peace-Keeping Force in Chad", *Conflict Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 1 (Winter 1991), pp. 7-23.

<sup>9</sup> Differences between the two councils were linked to the December 2008 Prodi report, op. cit., which the PSC was keen to discuss at the meeting, but which Security Council members were reluctant to engage on. Tensions also arose due to suggestions that the meeting was not a formal one between the two councils but rather a meeting between the PSC and "the members of the Security Council". "Working together for peace and security in Africa", *Security Council Report*, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, New York, 19 December 2018; Crisis Group interview, African diplomat, Addis Ababa, 15 March 2019.

<sup>11</sup> For example, at a July 2017 UN Security Council meeting on UN-AU cooperation, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said, "In the Gambia, for example, the strong leadership of West African nations, with the support of the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union and the United Nations, made a significant contribution to reaching a peaceful settlement to a political crisis". UN Security Council 8006th meeting, 19 July 2017. See also Paul D. Williams, "A New African Model of Coercion? Assessing the ECOWAS Missions in The Gambia", IPI Global Observatory, 16 March 2017.

In general, however, the Gambia example is more the exception than the rule.<sup>12</sup> None of the Security Council's permanent members has accepted the idea that the body should always follow the PSC's line. Indeed, France, the UK and the U.S. (the P3) jealously guard their primacy in the management and resolution of international conflict, and typically expect to take the lead, especially where UN peacekeepers are present. These three countries continue to draft the vast majority of Security Council resolutions on Africa (and elsewhere) and often disregard or override PSC positions.

One episode in the Security Council that is still a source of contention for PSC members is the 2011 Libyan crisis. The A3 voted for Security Council Resolution 1973, which authorised military intervention in Libya and also encouraged the AU to mediate in the conflict. AU officials and diplomats still harbour resentment that the P3 effectively dropped the diplomatic option once the resolution passed, and instead pursued a NATO-led military operation to the point of regime change. (Divisions among the African members of the Security Council at the time, reflecting their differing attitudes to Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Qadhafi, also undermined the AU's calls.)<sup>13</sup> In 2015 and 2016, the Security Council also sapped PSC efforts to head off mounting violence in Burundi. It voiced only lukewarm support for the AU's deployment of human rights observers and military experts, and it gave a cool reception to the AU's proposed intervention force (discussed further below).

Since the December 2018 dispute over UN funding of AU peace operations, however, the three African members sitting on the Security Council – Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea and South Africa – have repeatedly questioned the body's right to address crises in Africa without reference to the PSC's positions. After both President Omar al-Bashir's ouster in Sudan and the breakout of hostilities on the outskirts of the Libyan capital between forces commanded by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar and those loyal to the UN-backed government, South Africa insisted that the UN refrain from acting – or even making a statement – until the PSC had time to clarify its position. The delay frustrated some non-African Council members who wanted to move quickly to take a strong stance, and felt that the A3's position gave political cover to other actors – such as Russia in both cases and the U.S. in the Libyan case – that wanted to minimise the UN's role in addressing these crises.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Among other things, it was an instance where none of the P5 had strong national interests at stake, and where the likely impact of the crisis outside Africa was negligible.

<sup>13</sup> "From 2005-2011 the relations were very good ... but then Libya came and killed everything", said an AU official describing the relationship between the two councils. Crisis Group interview, AU official, Addis Ababa, 15 March 2019. All three African Council members – South Africa, Gabon and Nigeria – supported Resolution 1973, but while South Africa emphasised a diplomatic response, Nigerian leaders "were eager to see [Qadhafi] depart". Alex de Waal, "The African Union and the Libyan Conflict of 2011", World Peace Foundation, 19 December 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Crisis Group interview, Security Council diplomat, New York, April 2019. South Africa also made a public complaint in April about the permanent members of the Council's refusal to listen to African positions on Western Sahara (a situation that France and the U.S. have traditionally dealt with in New York). After South Africa abstained from a resolution renewing the UN mission in Western Sahara, Ambassador Jerry Matjila told the Security Council that "this is again an example of an African issue being decided by those that are not from the continent". "The Situation Concerning Western Sahara – Security Council, 8518th meeting", video, UN Web TV, 30 April 2019.



Conversely, the A3 became frustrated themselves after the PSC adopted a firm line on the need for a transition to civilian rule in Sudan, but Security Council members with close ties to the military in Khartoum – most significantly China and Russia – blocked any UN statement endorsing the AU’s position.<sup>15</sup> When the PSC finally suspended Sudan’s AU membership after government forces attacked civilian protesters in Khartoum in early June, the Security Council still took almost a week to agree on a statement, which ultimately made no direct reference to the PSC’s decision. Moreover, the Russians and Chinese rejected a unified call by the A3 for the Council to support the PSC decision explicitly on the basis that the Council should not interfere in Sudan’s internal affairs.<sup>16</sup>

While these diplomatic wrangles may have made little difference for UN or AU crisis management in these cases, they signal an uncomfortable future for inter-council cooperation. The combination of P3 high-handedness on peace and security matters, African insistence on African solutions, P5 protection of regional partners and clients, and Russian and Chinese reluctance to engage on matters they regard as internal affairs could make cooperation next to impossible. In order for the two bodies to support each other in the cause of conflict prevention and regional stability, it will be important to find ways to ease these sources of tension. It will also be important for each council to understand better the internal dynamics that are driving the other’s conduct.

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<sup>15</sup> Crisis Group interview, UN officials, New York, 11 June 2019. For a summary of the PSC’s deliberations on Sudan, see p. 9 of this report.

<sup>16</sup> Crisis Group interview, Security Council diplomat, New York, June 2019.

### III. Inside the Two Councils

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Both the Security Council and PSC face increasing internal contention that hampers effective coordination between the two. In New York, the P5 are frequently divided over how the Security Council should handle peacekeeping and peace-making in Africa, although situations on the continent (other than Libya) are still less divisive than the crises in Syria, Ukraine or Venezuela.<sup>17</sup> In Addis Ababa, the main challenge to the PSC involves African powers eroding the body's effectiveness.

#### A. *The Security Council: Disunity and Discord*

Diplomats and officials working on Security Council affairs in New York note three main trends in UN debates about Africa. The first is mounting dissension among the P3 over continental affairs. The second is growing friction over the same between the P3 and China and Russia. The third, already noted above, is the A3's discontent with the permanent members' actions.

Tensions among the P3 are especially significant because the Western powers draft and negotiate most resolutions among themselves before consulting with the rest of the Council (normally giving China and Russia a first chance to review texts before they go to the elected members). Over the last decade, the P3 have formed an informal but effective "penholder" system, dividing up drafting duties on specific files among themselves.<sup>18</sup> France thus acts as penholder on most Francophone African issues, while the UK and the U.S. lead on the Sudans and Somalia.<sup>19</sup> This system means that the A3 often have little early input into resolutions on major UN peace operations or political efforts on the continent. While the Council's elected members criticise the penholder system regularly, the P3 are unwilling to give up this privilege lightly.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For more on Security Council dynamics, see Crisis Group Special Briefing N°1, *Council of Despair? The Fragmentation of UN Diplomacy*, 30 April 2019.

<sup>18</sup> At present, P5 members hold the pen on all but eight of the 42 country-specific files and thematic issues comprising the Security Council's agenda. Among these, the P3 by themselves hold the pen on fourteen of seventeen country situations and thematic issues related to Africa. "Penholders and chairs", *Security Council Report*, 15 March 2019.

<sup>19</sup> The UK holds the pen on Somalia and Darfur, while the U.S. holds it on piracy off the coast of Somalia and Sudan.

<sup>20</sup> The UK did invite Germany (an elected Council member for 2019-2020) to "share the pen" on Sudan and Libyan sanctions issue this year, and among the A3 Côte d'Ivoire holds the pen on Guinea-Bissau and West Africa and the Sahel, with the exception of Mali, which France still leads. A3 members have held the pen on two African files – Guinea-Bissau and the UN Office for West African and the Sahel (UNOWAS) – in recent years. But capacity limitations meant that in 2018, Côte d'Ivoire sought out co-penholders for both files, arguing that English is not their first language. They thus shared the pen on Guinea-Bissau with the Netherlands and with Sweden on UNOWAS. Crisis Group phone interview, UN analyst, New York, June 2019. Senegal, a previous penholder on West Africa and the Sahel, also took a lead on the Gambian crisis in 2017, though this was a function of the fact that it had unique leverage over its neighbour. "Resolution on The Gambia", *What's in Blue*, 19 January 2017. For more on the influence of penholders within the Security Council, see "The penholder system", *Security Council Report*, 21 December 2018.

But having placed themselves in the driver's seat on peace and security issues in Africa, the P3 are increasingly at odds over how to handle African crises. This contest is primarily a Franco-American one. France has invested heavily in both sustaining robust UN missions in troubled Francophone countries, including the Central African Republic (CAR) and Mali, and pushing for the UN to offer more operational support to regional deployments such as the G5 Sahel Joint Force.<sup>21</sup> The U.S., and to a lesser extent the UK, has always been sceptical of the French approach, partly due to the cost and partly because the various UN and non-UN forces involved often appear ineffectual.<sup>22</sup> Public doubts were already surfacing in the Obama era: former U.S. ambassador to the UN Susan Rice once memorably described a French-backed plan for stabilising Mali as "crap".<sup>23</sup>

These divisions have intensified as the Trump administration has made cutting the costs of peacekeeping missions a recurrent priority.<sup>24</sup> In 2017, the U.S. threatened to veto the mandate of the UN stabilisation force in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which has existed in its current form since 2010.<sup>25</sup> Today, major points of contention are the UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the G5 force. U.S. diplomats have signalled that Washington may seek to reduce MINUSMA troop levels unless the Malian government speeds up reform and reconciliation efforts; they have also promised to veto any significant steps to boost UN support to the G5.<sup>26</sup> Debates over these questions (coupled with divisions over the Middle East) have frequently strained P3 unity in the Council.

In the meantime, both China and Russia have become more assertive about protecting their interests and allies in Africa. This pattern of behaviour is hardly unprecedented: Beijing and Moscow stiffly resisted P3 efforts to establish a UN force in Darfur in the middle of the last decade, for example, eventually compromising on an AU-UN hybrid mission (UNAMID).<sup>27</sup> It has nonetheless long been conventional wisdom at the UN that the P5 can work more constructively on African affairs than on situations like Syria and Ukraine, but this distinction is starting to fray. Russia has laid claim to a say on events in CAR (where it now has military forces and security advisers) and objected to even weak criticisms of its allies in Sudan and Libya.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Security Council diplomats, New York, December 2017. For more, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°258, *Finding the Right Role for the G5 Sahel Joint Force*, 12 December 2017; and Crisis Group Briefing, *Council of Despair? The Fragmentation of UN Diplomacy*, op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Gowan, "Is the Patchwork Approach to Stabilising the Sahel the Future of Crisis Management?", *World Politics Review*, 22 January 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Colum Lynch, "Rice: French plan for Mali intervention is 'crap'", *Foreign Policy*, 11 December 2013. For more on France's efforts to internationalise the Malian conflict, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°201, *Mali: Security, Dialogue and Meaningful Reform*, 11 April 2013.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, "The Threat of US Cuts: Helping Peacekeeping Help Itself?", IPI Global Observatory, 30 March 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Security Council diplomats, New York, March 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Security Council diplomats, New York, August 2017. See also Crisis Group Briefing, *Council of Despair? The Fragmentation of UN Diplomacy*, op. cit. The MINUSMA mandate is due to be renewed on 27 June 2019.

<sup>27</sup> For more, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°166, *China's Growing Role in UN Peacekeeping*, 17 April 2009, pp. 20-22.

<sup>28</sup> For more, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°277, *Making the Central African Republic's Latest Peace Agreement Stick*, 18 June 2019.

While Chinese diplomats are more cautious in stating their positions, they have also blocked the P3 from putting pressure on their friends in the Sudans and Burundi.<sup>29</sup>

True, UN diplomacy over African affairs remains less confrontational than in other regions. China and Russia now frequently abstain on P3 resolutions on Africa to express displeasure, but neither has cast a veto on a resolution relating to the continent since 2008, when the two powers blocked a text criticising President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe.<sup>30</sup> It seems probable in the short term that the P5 will find compromise solutions on most African items on their agenda – Libya being an outlier – but these may become harder to secure as time goes on.

Under any circumstances, however, the P5's dominant role means that the A3 have limited options for shaping Security Council diplomacy on the continent. In purely practical terms, the Council's elected members often only have days or at best weeks to review draft resolutions that the P5 have hammered out among themselves. (There are occasional exceptions: for example, the U.S. worked closely with Ethiopia, when on the Council, on peacekeeping in Abyei in 2018, while France has liaised with South Africa regarding the UN operation in the DRC.<sup>31</sup>) The resulting time crunch often comes at the expense of African input. Moreover, the P3 are willing to push through resolutions concerning Africa with little or no A3 support if they otherwise have the votes. By way of example, in 2018, the U.S. secured enough votes to impose an arms embargo on South Sudan despite enjoying support from only one African member (Côte d'Ivoire), and in 2019 it pushed through a renewal with all three A3 members abstaining (as well as China and Russia).<sup>32</sup>

The cost of the P5's recurrent disregard for the A3 to inter-council cooperation is considerable.<sup>33</sup> It bolsters the belief that the Security Council's Africa-related decisions are often illegitimate. And it has fuelled a sense of frustration – which crystallised following the 2018 breakdown of Security Council negotiations on funding for

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<sup>29</sup> China and Russia have been vocal supporters of Burundi's demand that the country be removed from the Security Council agenda, claiming that the situation there does not constitute a threat to international peace and security. "Special Envoy, briefing Security Council, calls for reassessment of how best to help Burundi emerge from political impasse", UNSC S/PV.8408, 21 November 2018. China also joined Russia in watering down a Security Council statement in response to the violence in Khartoum in June 2019. Crisis Group interview, Security Council diplomat, New York, June 2019.

<sup>30</sup> In contrast, P5 states have vetoed 21 draft resolutions on other regions – mostly involving conflicts in the Middle East and Eastern Europe – since the failed Zimbabwe draft resolution. For more, see "Security Council – Veto List", Dag Hammarskjöld Library, 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Security Council diplomats, New York, April 2018 and June 2019. As of March 2019, Ethiopian troops comprise 90 per cent of the UN's peacekeeping mission in Abyei, UNISFA. "UNISFA Fact Sheet", United Nations Peacekeeping.

<sup>32</sup> Resolution 2471 (2019) was adopted with ten votes in favour and the aforementioned five abstentions. "Resolution 2471 – Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan", UNSC S/Res/2471, 30 May 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Beyond the legitimacy issues discussed in this paragraph, the perception that the P3 is sidelining and manipulating the A3 feeds anti-colonial sentiment at the AU and exacerbates Anglophone-Francophone tensions between member states, themselves a legacy of colonial rule.

AU-led peace operations – that has caused the A3 to start openly challenging the legitimacy of actions lacking support in Addis.<sup>34</sup>

### B. *The PSC's Waning Influence*

In recent years, the PSC has grown increasingly cautious in the face of blowback from African leaders. This conservatism stems from a failed attempt at decisive action in Burundi: in January 2016, the PSC, meeting at the heads of state level, overturned a bold decision previously taken by ambassadors (the level at which the PSC normally meets) to send an intervention force to Burundi. This rebuke from heads of state dealt a serious blow to the PSC ambassadors' confidence in Addis Ababa and harmed the body's credibility.<sup>35</sup>

Three and a half years later, it has not fully recovered. Indeed, the PSC's agenda reflects a reluctance to wade into sensitive conflict-related issues.<sup>36</sup> It is packed with thematic deliberations on topics such as child marriage, which, although important, are not particularly germane to its mandate and crowd out substantive discussions on existing and emerging conflicts.

The Anglophone crisis in Cameroon illustrates the PSC's new reticence in the face of conflict. Hundreds of civilians, security personnel and separatists have died in the conflict and more than a thousand militias are active. But the PSC has remained silent on the matter, partly because the Cameroon government has lobbied Addis hard to stay out of it, but also because the Burundi fallout has discouraged members from tabling issues that could be considered "internal" affairs.<sup>37</sup> This caginess is in contrast to the early 2010s, when the PSC was sometimes willing to challenge even the AU's most influential members – as illustrated by the swift and highly controversial suspension of Egypt, one of the five biggest contributors to the AU budget, following the ouster of President Mohamed Morsi in July 2013.

AU member states are not blind to the PSC's declining influence, but instead of trying to arrest it, some are actively contributing to it. For example, at its July 2018 summit the Assembly of Heads of State decided to curtail the PSC's work on Western Sahara in order to mollify Morocco, which rejoined the AU in 2017.<sup>38</sup>

Recent attempts by sitting AU chairpersons to bypass the PSC or undermine its decisions represent a further challenge to its authority. In January 2019, Rwanda's President Paul Kagame, then AU chairperson, chose to circumvent the PSC and instead rely on an ad hoc group of presidents and prime ministers in his failed attempt

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<sup>34</sup> Crisis Group interviews, diplomat, Addis Ababa, 14 January 2019; Western diplomats and AU official, Addis Ababa, 24-25 January 2019; African diplomat and AU official, Addis Ababa, 14-15 March 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°122, *The African Union and the Burundi Crisis: Ambition versus Reality*, 28 September 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Crisis Group Commentary, *Eight Priorities for the African Union in 2019*, 6 February 2019. The ambassadors in Addis are not as bold as their ministerial counterparts, fearing to put issues on the AU's agenda lest they incur the wrath of ministers or presidents.

<sup>37</sup> Crisis Group Commentary, *Eight Priorities for the African Union in 2019*, op. cit.

<sup>38</sup> Morocco had left the AU's predecessor organisation, the Organisation of African Unity, 33 years earlier in protest over the admission of the Polisario Front, a Sahrawi liberation movement.

to halt the manipulation of the DRC's presidential election.<sup>39</sup> Then in April 2019, the current AU chairperson, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, convened another ad hoc group of leaders to discuss management of Sudan's political crisis. Despite a very clear PSC communiqué demanding that Sudan's Transitional Military Council – which had deposed President Omar al-Bashir following months of public protests – hand over power to a civilian-led political authority within fifteen days, or risk suspension from the AU, Sisi used the meeting to push the PSC to extend its deadline by three months.<sup>40</sup>

The PSC's firm defence of its prerogative in this instance – it offered the Sudanese junta a compromise two-month extension, before swiftly suspending Sudan following the bloody crackdown on unarmed protesters on 3 June – was an important victory in attempts to bypass it.<sup>41</sup> Time will tell, however, whether the PSC can build on this robust performance.

Some senior AU officials may be unwittingly aiding member states' efforts to sideline the PSC with their working practices. Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat, for example, clearly prefers quiet diplomacy over the PSC's more public arena when addressing crises.<sup>42</sup> There is often a case for such a discreet approach, but it comes at a cost to the PSC's authority, and risks further reducing the PSC's credibility and political capital for responding to major crises in the future.

AU member states' continued attempts to curb, overrule or work around the PSC create challenges for efforts to foster strong inter-council relations and make it more difficult to sustain arguments that the Security Council owes the PSC greater regard.

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<sup>39</sup> Crisis Group interview, AU official, Addis Ababa, 6 April 2019.

<sup>40</sup> "African Union tells Sudan military Council to hand power to civilians within 60 days", *The East African*, 1 May 2019; and "African Union suspends Sudan over violence against protesters", *The Guardian*, 6 June 2019. The attempts by Kagame and Sisi to use the office of the AU chairperson, traditionally a largely symbolic post, to influence peace and security issues, illustrates the ongoing shift in the balance of power between the PSC and individual African leaders.

<sup>41</sup> Crisis Group interviews, senior AU and UN officials, PSC diplomat, April and June 2019.

<sup>42</sup> Faki's preferred approach has seen success in Madagascar and Comoros, where the deployment of a special envoy has helped ease tensions. Crisis Group interview, AU official, Addis Ababa, 15 March 2019; "African Union welcomes new Madagascar PM", *The East African*, 5 June 2018; and "AU High Representative Ramtane Lamamra Welcomes Inaugural Session of Inter-Comorian Dialogue", press release, AU, 14 September 2018.

## **IV. Channels of Communication**

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In addition to the political differences that divide the Security Council and the PSC, there are other obstacles to their cooperation, many of which lie in the realm of communication and related procedure. The Security Council and PSC started to meet regularly in the mid-2000s, but there have always been obstacles to cooperation. These persistent barriers largely fall into three categories. First, there are basic issues of institutional pride, given that, as discussed, both Security Council and PSC ambassadors have institutional interests in avoiding deferring to one another. Secondly, there is often a simple lack of knowledge about what the other is doing and their respective working methods. Existing liaison mechanisms, such as the AU Observer Mission in New York, are not strong enough to compensate for this deficiency. Thirdly, the two councils lack protocols for operational cooperation, such as joint visits to crisis-hit countries that could stimulate discussions about joint problem-solving and draw the two bodies closer together.

### *A. Pride and Prejudice*

The two councils have never fully emerged from the jockeying for primacy that severely upset their relations in 2009. For example, to avoid giving the impression that the bodies are equal, during their annual joint consultation, Security Council members represent their individual states rather than the Council as an institution. Many AU diplomats and officials see this practice as a diplomatic slight.<sup>43</sup> The PSC also engages in its own form of status seeking. Some ambassadors, for example, have been reluctant to align the PSC's agenda with items upcoming in New York, for fear that doing so makes it look like a secondary organisation. A few even argue that the Security Council should in fact align its agenda with the PSC's.<sup>44</sup>

This posture is self-defeating. As discussed, one reason why the P5 sometimes fail to take African input into account is the lack of time for discussions once the P5 have agreed among themselves. But if the PSC were to meet and agree on a communiqué concerning, for example, the future of a UN peace operation one to two months before the Security Council renewed the operation's mandate, this clear "African position" would help frame discussions in New York. Moreover, such an institutional statement – especially if the A3 stood behind it – would be more difficult for permanent members to look past than input offered at the eleventh hour of negotiations.

### *B. Knowledge and Liaison*

On a day-to-day basis, PSC members often struggle to follow what is happening in the Security Council, and vice versa. During periods of fast-moving crisis, this problem intensifies, and timely inter-council coordination becomes more difficult, as recently witnessed in the case of Sudan.

There are a number of reasons for the poor coordination. One, almost unavoidable, factor is that most important Security Council and PSC discussions of necessity

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<sup>43</sup> Crisis Group interview, AU and UN officials and African minister, Addis Ababa, 15-19 March 2019.

<sup>44</sup> Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, New York, 19 December 2018; Crisis Group interview, African diplomat, Addis Ababa, 15 March 2019.

take place in private. We have already noted how much of the Security Council's essential business is sorted out among the P3 and P5, and that even broader deliberations often take place behind closed doors. Unless the PSC has a solid inside source at the Security Council – such as an adept A3 member – its representatives will lack real-time insights into UN affairs.

Additionally, some PSC members' embassies in Addis Ababa find it difficult to keep close track of events in New York. Many member states' missions to the AU are small, and the teams are overloaded with immediate diplomatic business. Although the PSC's founding protocol stipulates that members should sufficiently staff and resource their embassies both in Addis Ababa and New York to be able to fulfil their duties as Council members, the requirement is not enforced.<sup>45</sup> The AU Permanent Observer Mission in New York, which is supposed to serve as a secretariat for the A3 and provide a link with the PSC, should fill some of the member states' capacity gaps. With only a handful of staff, however, and limited financial resources, it is unable to fulfil its mandate.<sup>46</sup>

If PSC members struggle to follow events in the Security Council, diplomats in New York often have little insight into decision-making in Addis Ababa. Some Security Council members, especially the P5, have significant diplomatic presence in Addis Ababa, but their access to PSC meetings has diminished in recent years. Whereas the PSC used to invite P5 members routinely to the opening sessions of its deliberations, it is now more likely to bring in institutional partners such as the EU delegation and the UN Office to the AU, if anyone at all. Neither the P5 nor the P3 meet as a caucus to discuss political issues with PSC members.<sup>47</sup>

In this environment, the two councils' members can misinterpret each other's processes and priorities in a way that creates quite significant ill will. The controversy over UN funding for AU peace operations at the end of 2018 offers an instructive example. In this case, the PSC formulated a draft Security Council resolution with the A3, but it did not adequately prepare for the inevitable diplomatic haggling that followed in New York. The PSC did not provide A3 ambassadors with negotiating instructions they could use to navigate Security Council member's concerns. Some PSC members expected their UN counterparts to accept the resolution without amendment.<sup>48</sup>

Then things got messy. Without the ability to make concessions, and unable to obtain further guidance from the PSC in a timely manner, the A3 first struggled un-

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<sup>45</sup> "Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union", *op. cit.*, Article 5 (2h).

<sup>46</sup> African diplomats in New York are unsure about the AU mission's function, including the extent of its authority to act as a broker between the PSC and A3. They say they often receive information from Addis through unofficial channels before the Permanent Observer Mission has heard anything. Crisis Group interviews, African diplomats, New York, February 2019; African minister, Addis Ababa, 15 March 2019.

<sup>47</sup> This is especially true for the U.S. and China, both of which have an ambassador in Addis Ababa dedicated solely to the AU. The UK has also recently increased the number of diplomats working on AU affairs, while France received AU Commission Chairperson Faki in March 2019 for the first session of a strategic dialogue with the AU. "Joint Statement issued by France and the African Union Commission during the first strategic dialogue devoted to regional integration and multilateral challenges", statement, France Diplomatie, 11 June 2019.

<sup>48</sup> Crisis Group interview, African diplomat, Addis Ababa, 22 January 2019.



successfully to get the resolution passed and then became divided among themselves as Côte d'Ivoire tabled an alternative text worked out with France.<sup>49</sup> When the U.S. threatened to veto the resolution, some African member states did not seem to absorb the seriousness of the threat while others believed that they could use the U.S. ultimatum to their own advantage.<sup>50</sup> Eventually, the A3 angrily let the issue go, expressing particular frustration with the U.S. Diplomats close to the controversy agree that the U.S. was never likely to support the resolution, but many feel that the PSC and A3's miscalculations about Security Council dynamics exacerbated the intensity of the dispute and the bitter feelings that linger.<sup>51</sup>

### C. *Operational Cooperation and Glitches*

Given the difficulties in communicating between New York and Addis Ababa, it is important for the two councils to engage face to face. Meeting in person is not without its own challenges, however. While diplomats on both sides generally consider their annual joint consultative meetings helpful, they claim that the exchanges suffer from excessively long agendas; limited preparation; and a lack of actionable outcomes for the two bodies to work on together throughout the year to deepen cooperation.<sup>52</sup>

Joint field visits provide another option for improving council-to-council contacts. UN diplomats value the Security Council's now quite frequent trips to Africa (which tend to involve representatives of all fifteen members) as a chance to assess realities on the ground and engage in direct diplomacy with politicians involved in crises.<sup>53</sup> The PSC places the same stock in its own field missions, and many of its members are keen to combine them with the Security Council's.<sup>54</sup> While groups in Addis continue to explore how to broker joint visits, past discussions about the subject have tended to increase tensions between the two councils and attempts to organise the visits have foundered on questions over whether the Security Council and PSC members would have the same status within the joint party – PSC members believe that

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<sup>49</sup> The PSC would have needed to meet in order to amend the draft resolution. The proximity to the Christmas holidays meant it could not.

<sup>50</sup> Crisis Group interviews, AU official, African minister, African diplomat, Addis Ababa, 14-15 March 2019. Crisis Group interview, African diplomat, New York, 30 November 2018.

<sup>51</sup> Crisis Group interviews, African and European diplomats, New York, April 2019.

<sup>52</sup> One Security Council diplomat explained that there was "no point having a communiqué just for the sake of it. If there was no end product but candid discussions, that would be better. ... We would rather talk about things that matter". Crisis Group interview, Security Council diplomat, New York, February 2019. For more on the haggling over agenda items prior to these meetings, see Lesley Connolly, "AU-UN partnership is a necessity not an option", *Global Peace Operations Review*, 2 June 2016.

<sup>53</sup> In the past five years, the Security Council has visited South Sudan, Burundi and the DRC at moments of serious turbulence in each case. This year it visited Mali to review MINUSMA and Burkina Faso to observe the deteriorating situation there.

<sup>54</sup> In the past three years, the AU PSC made visits to: Somalia in May 2017; DRC in November 2017; Lake Chad Basin in December 2017; CAR in March 2018; Sudan in May 2018; and Guinea-Bissau in July 2018. In March 2019, they visited South Sudan, following up on the implementation status of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) signed on 12 September 2018.

Security Council members would insist on precedence – as well as procedural gaffes and misunderstandings.<sup>55</sup>

A3 members have urged the Security Council to carry out its visiting missions to Africa in conjunction with the PSC.<sup>56</sup> But P3 members have rejected this proposal on practical grounds, asserting that the logistics of 30 members (fifteen each from both Councils) all going on the same visit, sitting in on the same meetings and making statements in their national capacities would be unworkable at best and counterproductive at worst. This position has some merit; indeed, most Security Council members admit in private that their missions are too large already, and would like smaller subsets of diplomats to travel, but nobody wants to be left behind.<sup>57</sup> African diplomats, however, describe these concerns as “only a pretext” for excluding the PSC.<sup>58</sup> Traveling with a larger group is possible, as the joint visit to CAR by the PSC and the EU Political and Security Committee in March 2018 illustrates.<sup>59</sup>

A compromise solution sought by P3 members would be to invite the sitting PSC chair on Security Council visiting missions. PSC members feel slighted by this suggestion, arguing for a more equal footing. They have also taken offence at how the Security Council has sent the invitations to Addis, in particular their late arrival.<sup>60</sup> In reality, however, these delays are often caused by intra-Security Council squabbles regarding the particulars of each visit.<sup>61</sup> As a result, AU PSC chairs regularly decline the Security Council’s invitations and both bodies have missed numerous opportunities for joint engagement in major crises.

The recent establishment in Addis of the Group of Friends UN-AU Partnership, which aims to strengthen the relationship between the two institutions and promote greater collaboration, is a welcome development and should also provide a platform for the PSC and Security Council to meet more regularly.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Crisis Group interview, senior AU official, June 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Joint visits also featured in negotiations on the late 2018 draft resolution on financing of AU-led peace operations. A3 members pushed to include language in the text on joint visits by the two councils to conflict situations in Africa. Crisis Group interview, A3 diplomat, New York, November 2018.

<sup>57</sup> Crisis Group interview, P3 diplomats, New York, February 2019.

<sup>58</sup> Crisis Group interview, African diplomats, New York, February 2019. Crisis Group interview, AU official, Addis Ababa, 6 April 2019.

<sup>59</sup> From 7-9 March 2018, the joint AU-EU field mission – composed of all fifteen AU PSC members and all 28 EU PSC members – took place in the context of the two organisations’ common agenda aimed at supporting CAR’s sustainable stabilisation. It was co-led by the AU PSC chairperson for the month and the EU PSC permanent chairman. “Joint press statement of the joint field mission of the AU PSC and EU PSC to the Central African Republic”, statement, AU, 9 March 2018.

<sup>60</sup> In the lead-up to the Security Council’s October 2018 visit to the DRC, for example, PSC members were reportedly offended that the invitation to join the visit was only sent from New York via note verbale from the Security Council president at the time and that there was no accompanying phone call. “And they took it personally”. Crisis Group interview, UN official, New York, 1 February 2019.

<sup>61</sup> Members can often take weeks, and sometimes even months, to finalise the terms of reference for a Security Council visiting mission. The final terms of reference and list of interlocutors whom diplomats will be meeting are usually confirmed just days prior to departure. While several Security Council diplomats acknowledge that they could make more concerted efforts to invite AU PSC counterparts as early as possible, they also argue that such delays are often caused by factors outside their control. Crisis Group interviews, Security Council diplomats, New York, February-March 2019.

<sup>62</sup> “Strengthening the collaborative approach of the UN and AU in peace, security and development”, UN Office to African Union, 21 May 2019. Crisis Group interview, senior AU official, June 2019.

## V. The A3: Stuck in the Middle

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In the absence of strong institutional channels for Security Council-PSC cooperation, the A3 has a particular burden to create links between the two councils. But communication mechanisms between the A3 and the PSC are under-developed. As noted at the outset, the PSC has called on the A3 to represent its positions in New York, but political dynamics at both the AU and UN, in addition to the A3's own national interests, impede this ambition.

### A. *The A3 and the Peace and Security Council*

There is disagreement among AU member states about the extent to which the A3 should push for the adoption of PSC decisions in New York. Some believe that, because the AU selects and endorses African Security Council members, they should represent the continent's interests.<sup>63</sup> They see great utility in establishing common positions, backing each other in negotiations and combining efforts toward outcomes that may represent intra-African compromises but are in tune with regional interests. For example, during its 2017-2018 Security Council term, Ethiopia regularly sought to achieve clear positions to be adopted by A3 members during discussions on African crises.<sup>64</sup> This year, South Africa has emphasised the need for unity – agreeing on common A3 statements where possible – and underlined the trio's responsibility to follow PSC decisions on issues like Sudan.<sup>65</sup>

Other members, however, argue that despite previous AU Assembly decisions and PSC communiqués on the topic, the A3 have no formal obligation to champion PSC positions insofar as they represent their national governments – not the AU – on the Security Council.<sup>66</sup> Egypt, for example, took issue with the April 2016 PSC communiqué recalling the A3's "special responsibility" to ensure that PSC decisions are reflected at the Security Council.<sup>67</sup> This statement came in the midst of unsuccess-

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<sup>63</sup> While the ten elected seats on the Security Council are nominally filled through elections every June, the three African seats have traditionally been determined through a sub-regional rotation among North, Southern, East, West and Central African member states. A3 candidates, thus, are elected through uncontested votes at the UN General Assembly. For more, see "Security Council elections 2019", *Security Council Report*, May 2019.

<sup>64</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Security Council diplomats, New York, November-December 2018. A3 unity was a major feature in negotiations on a resolution on the Lake Chad basin in March 2017. African diplomats described the then A3 – Egypt, Ethiopia and Senegal – as having a clear position in those discussions and Western members admitted that those countries were able to lobby effectively because of their common stance. Crisis Group interviews, Security Council diplomats, New York, March-April 2017.

<sup>65</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Security Council diplomats, 4 and 15 April 2019.

<sup>66</sup> At its January 2016 summit, the AU Assembly underlined the A3's "special responsibility to ensure that the decisions of the PSC are well reflected in the decision-making process of the UNSC on peace and security issues of concern to Africa". It further called on the A3, working with the AU Commission and the permanent observer mission in New York, to present reports through the PSC to the General Assembly on their efforts at the Security Council. "Twenty-Sixth Ordinary Session of the AU – Decisions, declarations and resolutions", AU, Assembly/AU/Dec.598(XXVI), 31 January 2016.

<sup>67</sup> Crisis Group interview, Security Council diplomat, New York, April 2016. The communiqué reaffirmed the need for the A3 to "respect, protect, promote in all circumstances, decisions and posi-

ful calls from PSC members for the Security Council to support the deployment of AU human rights observers to Burundi. As one African diplomat told Crisis Group at the time, “The AU is not a supranational body that supersedes our own sovereignty. ... The PSC decision-making does not reflect the thinking of their capitals”.<sup>68</sup> It is a view that many member states share.

Those members that support common African positions also emphasise the bridging role the A3 can play between the two councils, advocating that the A3 be responsible for “translating” PSC decisions for their counterparts in New York, and vice versa. A3 ambassadors, however, often lack in-depth understanding of PSC decisions themselves. Except for a single annual retreat, the PSC and A3 ambassadors have very few formal mechanisms with which to interact.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, the A3 are not invited to closed PSC meetings – the same meetings where common positions are decided upon. Failing to adequately involve the A3 in PSC meetings both reduces their ownership of outcomes and increases the likelihood that they will revert to reflecting national interests at the Security Council. By excluding the A3 from its closed meetings, the PSC is also missing out on crucial information about the climate and dynamics in New York that could change the way they approach certain issues.

#### B. *The A3 and the Security Council*

In New York, non-African Security Council members – Western and non-Western alike – often do their best to swing the A3 to their positions or, if that is impossible, to peel them apart for tactical gain. This manoeuvring can have the effect of steering them away from PSC positions.<sup>70</sup> In December 2018, as noted above, Côte d’Ivoire broke the A3’s united front on the PSC-backed resolution on UN funding for AU peace operations, tabling a compromise resolution worked out with France.<sup>71</sup> This direct challenge to the PSC line compounded the already difficult UN talks on the issue, and saw a souring in relations between the Ivoirians and Ethiopians within the A3. Western diplomats claim that this split made the final stages of negotiation exceptionally difficult, and precluded any last-minute compromises with the U.S.<sup>72</sup>

Since the turn of the year, the A3 members have made some effort to restore a sense of unity. The trio hold regular meetings in New York with UN officials. South Africa, in particular, has encouraged its counterparts to align their positions and potentially make common statements.<sup>73</sup> In June, frustrated by the Security Council’s failure to follow the PSC’s line on Sudan, they held a rare press conference in New

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tions of the AU” and called on A3 members to regularly report to the PSC on their activities. “595th Meeting of the AU PSC”, communiqué, AU PSC PSC/PR/COMM.3(DXCV), 28 April 2016.

<sup>68</sup> Crisis Group interview, Security Council diplomat, New York, May 2016.

<sup>69</sup> Crisis Group interview, senior AU official, June 2019.

<sup>70</sup> Crisis Group interview, senior AU official, June 2019.

<sup>71</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Security Council diplomats and UN officials, New York, January–February 2019.

<sup>72</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Security Council permanent member diplomat, New York, February 2019; African diplomat and senior AU official, Addis Ababa, 14 March 2019.

<sup>73</sup> Crisis Group interview, Security Council A3 diplomat, New York, April 2019.

York to underline their commitment to the PSC's calls for civilian rule in Khartoum and praise "the leadership shown by the African Union".<sup>74</sup>

Nonetheless, A3 members expect to face more attempts by other powers to split them up. Those efforts will grow especially intense as the P5 increasingly vie for influence and pressure A3 members to either help them get the nine votes needed under UN rules to adopt their favoured resolutions or join blocking coalitions to deny their rivals the nine votes that they require.<sup>75</sup>

In this context, and given the underlying obstacles to their exerting influence in New York, the A3's options for actively pushing PSC priorities in the Security Council are often limited. One area where they can at least set the agenda is through their presidency of the Security Council. Elected members chair the body at least once – and often twice – during their two-year memberships and during these months can organise high-level debates and briefings on issues of their choosing. In the past, A3 members have used their presidencies to highlight crises and trends relevant to peace and security in Africa.<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, they have generally not done so in close coordination with the PSC.

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<sup>74</sup> Press conference by the African members (A3) of the UN Security Council on the situation in Sudan at the Security Council press stakeout, New York, 6 June 2019.

<sup>75</sup> While the P5 can also block resolutions through the use of their veto powers, the need to do so suggests a level of diplomatic isolation that most seek to avoid where possible. The A3's votes are also important in the case of votes on procedural matters where the P5's veto power does not apply and which can determine whether the Council should convene or suspend meetings. These votes – which require a minimum of nine affirmative votes – have been used with increasing frequency to block Council discussions. While there were twelve procedural votes total at the Council from 1992-2016, from 2017 to May 2019 there have been nine such votes. "UN Security Council working methods: procedural vote", *Security Council Report*, 20 May 2019.

<sup>76</sup> In December 2018, for example, Côte d'Ivoire hosted a debate on cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organisations in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. And in its September 2017 presidency, Ethiopia organised a meeting on UN-AU partnership.

## **VI. Practical Steps Forward**

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Although substantive political disputes can divide the PSC and Security Council (or paralyse one or both), diplomats on both sides could take some practical steps to mitigate procedural problems that exacerbate their differences. The foregoing analysis suggests options that the two councils could pursue.

### *A. Better Aligned Agendas*

One clear way in which the PSC could influence Security Council deliberations and decisions would be to discuss conflicts in advance of key Council meetings and mandate renewals.<sup>77</sup>

The PSC could, for example, hold deliberations on the next mandate renewal for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) peacekeeping mission and reach a consensus position regarding the situation and desired international response at least six weeks before the Council meets to debate on the subject.<sup>78</sup> Such a consensus could provide the A3 with a clear, joint negotiating stance from which to negotiate. The end result would be a PSC better able to guide discussions at the UN on African crises, although Security Council members might still opt not to defer to the PSC in the end.<sup>79</sup>

Also, to help ensure better alignment of the councils' agendas, the incoming PSC chair and Security Council president should meet at least one month before their terms start to jointly define areas of interest and ensure that the councils synchronise their schedules.

### *B. More Effective Joint Consultative Meetings*

The last joint consultative meeting between the PSC and Security Council in July 2018 was considered a success and offers some useful lessons for the two councils.<sup>80</sup>

The first lesson is that the ambassadors due to preside over both councils should begin consultations as early as possible to discuss, among other things, issues that will be considered at the forthcoming annual consultative meeting. Members should be careful not to overload the agenda and focus instead on one or two crises where both councils have clear and defined roles and where a joint discussion can advance efforts toward conflict prevention, mitigation or resolution.

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<sup>77</sup> As one UN official told Crisis Group, "The PSC needs to take decisions prior to the Security Council. The Security Council has clear reporting and mandate cycles". Crisis Group interview, UN official, New York, February 2019.

<sup>78</sup> The UN's peacekeeping mission in the DRC, MONUSCO, is next due to be renewed by 20 December 2019.

<sup>79</sup> The PSC deliberately held talks on AMISOM in early May 2019 in an effort to influence Security Council negotiations on the mission later in the month, but African diplomats felt that their conclusions were largely ignored in New York. Crisis Group interview, UN official, New York, June 2019.

<sup>80</sup> Several Council members – including both Africans and non-Africans – and UN officials described the meeting, the lead-up to it and its relatively speedy adoption of a joint communiqué as a model for future inter-council meetings. Crisis Group interviews, Security Council diplomats and UN officials, New York, January-February 2019.

Secondly, once the agenda has been determined, the relevant president and chair should undertake substantive discussions with the goal of developing a common negotiating position within their respective councils – or, in the likely event that such consensus is impossible, at least understanding the range of internal views that would be presented at the consultative meeting.

Thirdly, the chair and president should aim for language in their joint communiqué that stimulates increased cooperation. Where the two councils cannot decide upon a meaningful inter-council position, because of either internal or inter-council disagreements, they should use the communiqué to focus on areas where future joint engagement is possible.<sup>81</sup> They could, for example, agree on a joint visit to the conflict area in question or ask their respective secretariats to undertake a joint assessment that could inform a follow-up session.

Finally, in addition to formal sessions, the meeting should include some informal gatherings at which representatives could exchange views more freely. A number of diplomats in both councils told Crisis Group that such interactions during 2018 were useful.<sup>82</sup>

### *C. Joint Field Visits*

While the issue of joint field missions has become surprisingly fraught, efforts are ongoing to identify a formula to ensure that both councils are represented without making the missions unworkably large. One option floated by Security Council diplomats is inviting a “troika” of PSC chairs – the current, previous and incoming chairs – on Security Council visiting missions in Africa.<sup>83</sup> This arrangement may be unacceptable to the PSC, however, as it would not include representatives from each of the five sub-regions. Alternatives are being discussed by the P5 and A3 in New York and by the PSC and AU Commission in Addis Ababa. Possible compromises include forming a group of friends from both councils for each visit or agreeing on eight or nine members from each organ to represent the wider membership on visiting missions (on the UN side these could include the P5 and A3).<sup>84</sup> Beyond the symbolism, joint visits could help the two councils develop a common analysis of conflict situations.

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<sup>81</sup> Some member states of both Councils questioned the need for a formal communiqué, stating that agreeing on a compromise text was difficult and, as a result, often was not finalised until months after the meeting. Crisis Group interviews, Security Council diplomats, New York, February 2019.

<sup>82</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Security Council diplomats, New York, January-February 2019; diplomats and AU officials, Addis Ababa, January to March 2019; African minister, Addis Ababa, 15 March 2019.

<sup>83</sup> This format was discussed ahead of the Security Council’s October 2018 visit to the DRC. Crisis Group interview, UN official, New York, January 2019.

<sup>84</sup> Crisis Group interview, Security Council diplomat, New York, February 2019. In most of its activities, the AU tries to adhere to equal representation from its five sub-regions (East, North, South, Central and West Africa). President Paul Kagame’s suggestion of a troika of chairpersons (current, outgoing and incoming) that would represent the continent at major international events was rejected by leaders in part because all regions would not be represented.

#### D. *Bringing the A3 into PSC Deliberations*

The annual retreat that brings together PSC members with sitting and incoming A3 counterparts is a useful, albeit insufficient, platform for cooperation. Increased communication and coordination are needed if the AU is to maximise the PSC's influence on Security Council debates and decisions.

One way to achieve this would be to make A3 members an integral part of the PSC deliberation process. At the moment, only one A3 member (Equatorial Guinea) sits on both councils and there is no formal mechanism for ensuring that other African Security Council members routinely participate in the all-important PSC closed sessions. Allowing them to do so would give the A3 a fuller understanding of the analysis on which PSC resolutions are based and allow them to feed in perspectives from New York. It would also provide them with the opportunity to present their own national position, which often guide their actions at the UN, and enable the PSC to take those positions into account when making decisions. The AU is currently reforming the PSC's working methods, which offers an opportunity to put in place a framework for greater A3 participation.<sup>85</sup>

Moreover, if the A3 are to effectively reflect the PSC's decisions in New York, they will need a clear negotiating mandate that sets out the AU's red lines and possible areas for compromise. Non-African diplomats complain that talks with the A3 can lose momentum when they need to refer back to Addis for instructions, reducing the chances of finding tactical compromises in fast-moving situations.

#### E. *Boosting the A3's Capacities*

The most effective elected members of the Security Council traditionally have been those best prepared and with the largest staff.<sup>86</sup> With that in mind, African Security Council members could take two steps. First, they could invest in bigger teams in both New York and Addis with clear channels of communication and regular information exchange; their deployment optimally would be completed by the start of October when incoming members begin attending official Council meetings as observers.

Secondly, incoming African members should begin preparing for their terms as soon as they know they will be serving on the Council. They should begin internal consultations in home capitals as soon as possible to identify both country-specific and thematic issues that they want to prioritise during their terms – and especially whenever they assume the position of Council president. Elected members hold the chair at least once during their terms and can highlight key issues related to peace and security requiring Council attention. Some recent A3 members have seemed unclear on what issues they mean to prioritise and what Security Council subsidiary organs and sanctions committees – almost all of which are led by the ten elected

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<sup>85</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Africa peace and security expert, Addis Ababa, 22 January 2019; and AU official, Addis Ababa, 14 March 2019.

<sup>86</sup> For a good overview of the range of challenges involved in these preparations, see Gustavo de Carvalho, "Rejoining the High Table: South Africa and the Security Council", Institute for Security Studies, August 2018. Egypt, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Senegal prepared meticulously and fortified their missions with additional diplomatic staff and generally have had more successful terms on the Security Council.



members – they would like to chair, even well after their election. This lack of preparation leaves diplomats little time to get a grip on their files, build relations with counterparts in other missions or set out goals for their terms.<sup>87</sup>

External consultations are also useful for developing familiarity with Security Council working methods and establishing working relationships among diplomats. The respective New York missions of incoming countries ought to begin liaising with outgoing A3 members and other Council members as far in advance of their terms' commencement as possible. Incoming A3 members should ensure that necessary staff to arrive in New York, assume specific country files and begin attending relevant UNSC meetings in early October – even though Security Council terms do not begin until January. In the meantime, the A3's diplomats in Addis Ababa could use this time to consult with PSC members on the themes they plan to pursue during their Security Council presidencies, so they can present their initiatives as AU-wide rather than solely national in inspiration.

Many of these practices would also be useful for incoming PSC members, although timings and specifics would differ. In particular, increasing staffing levels at their missions in Addis Ababa and New York, preparing for their terms in advance, deciding on key issues of concern, and liaising closely with outgoing members could be beneficial.

#### *F. Strengthening the AU Permanent Observer Mission*

African states should also address the shortcomings of the Mission of the AU Permanent Observer. Optimally, the Mission would be equipped with clear instructions, enjoy sufficient leeway from the AU, and be better staffed and funded. These steps would improve coordination among the PSC, the A3 and the broader Security Council in that the Mission could consistently relay PSC decisions made in Addis to A3 diplomats in New York and also ensure the PSC has sufficient visibility on Security Council deliberations. A clear understanding of discussions inside the PSC combined with increased authority would make office a more reliable advocate on behalf of African member states in New York.

At present, the Mission is impeded by lack of staff and gaps in capacity. It includes two full-time diplomats working on peace and security issues in addition to the Permanent Observer. It also lacks authority to bring A3 members together around a common PSC position and instead follows the lead of the three African Council members. The Mission should be enabled to try to go beyond its coordinating role in instances where A3 members are not proactively advocating for PSC positions at the Security Council.

In order to be effective, it would likely need to enlarge its diplomatic team. The number of staff working on peace and security issues should at minimum be doubled if the office is to absorb information and instructions from Addis, apprise the AU and PSC of UN developments, and coordinate among the A3. Adding at least one military attaché likewise would be advantageous, given the number of UN peacekeeping missions deployed in Africa.

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<sup>87</sup> Elected members chair 23 of the Security Council's 24 subsidiary bodies and sanctions, committees.

### G. *Getting the Security Council to Listen to the PSC*

Proposals to improve PSC and A3 diplomacy are unlikely to make much difference unless Security Council members pay the AU's views greater heed. Discussions of problems between the two councils frequently circle back to PSC members' frustration that their counterparts do not treat their views with respect. PSC members often scan Security Council resolutions to see if they echo the language of AU decisions at all, but seldom find traces of their views.<sup>88</sup>

Despite the high pace of UN diplomacy, Security Council members should be able to take simple steps to signal greater sensitivity to the AU's views without sacrificing their own status under the UN Charter. As a threshold matter, Security Council members could look harder for ways to incorporate PSC resolution language into New York products. They could also engage more systematically with the A3 on resolutions concerning Africa (and especially peace operations on the continent) earlier in mandate negotiation processes, or request the New York-based representatives of the fifteen PSC members to join informal discussions of joint concerns.<sup>89</sup> In Addis Ababa, diplomats from Security Council members could hold private briefings – individually or collectively – for PSC members on upcoming issues on the Security Council agenda.

Such steps would not preclude breakdowns on inter-institutional relations at moments of stress, but they would at least reinforce the channels of communication outlined here and reduce the AU side's perception of disrespect from New York.

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<sup>88</sup> Crisis Group interview, official with experience in AU and UN, New York, June 2019.

<sup>89</sup> There is copious literature on improving mandate procedures to include non-P5 members. For the best recent example, see "Is Christmas really over? Improving the mandating of peace operations", *Security Council Report*, February 2019. The Council also has many formats for informal consultations with non-Council members, such as its Informal Interactive Dialogues, and there is no procedural block to the creation of new formats.

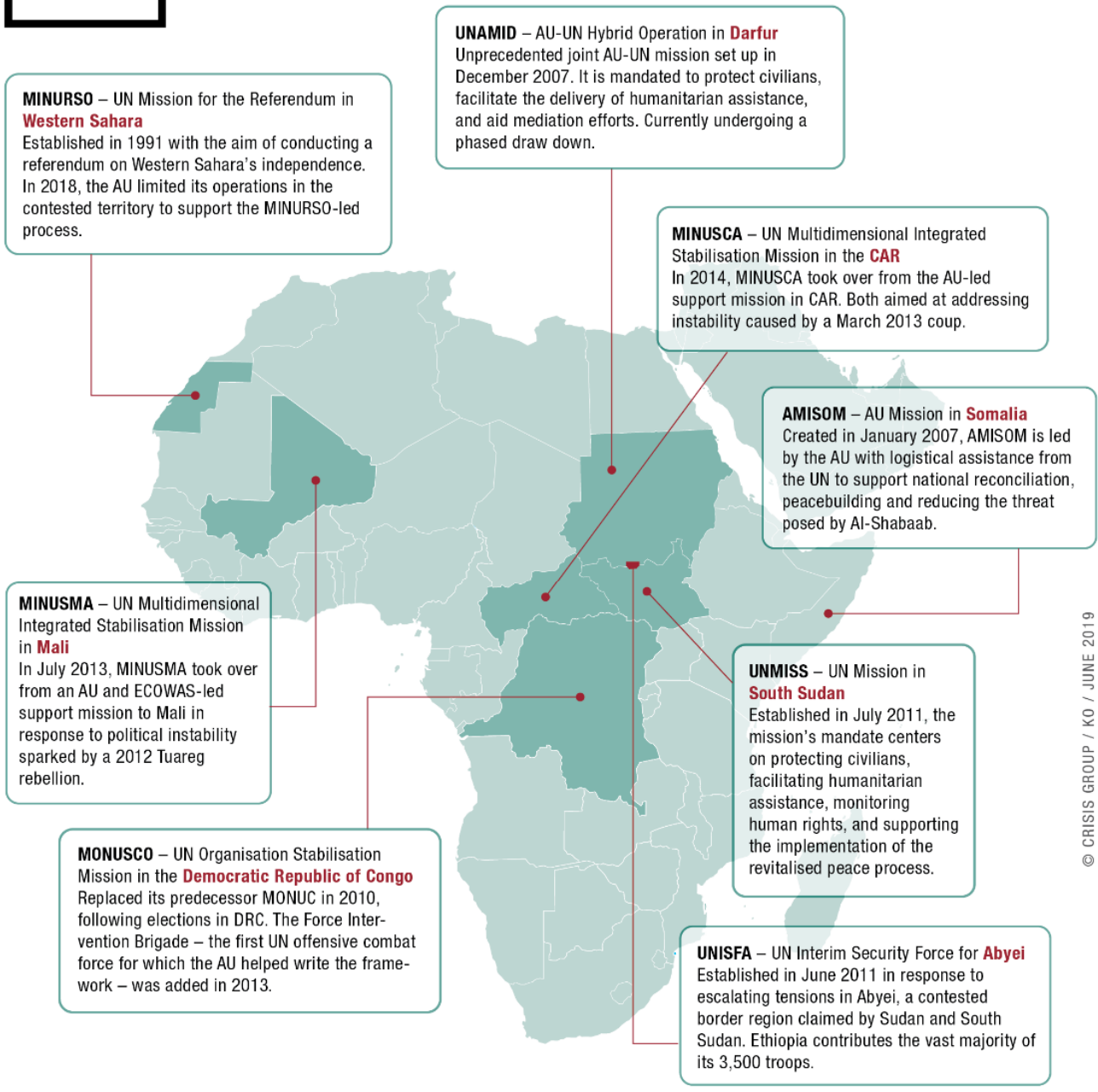
## **VII. Conclusion**

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The incremental steps forward outlined above could smooth the rough edges of PSC and Security Council cooperation, and they could be implemented relatively quickly. Although they would leave many of the political and status issues that have plagued inter-council relations unresolved, they are worth serious attention. If the PSC can establish stronger mechanisms for coordinating and transmitting its views to New York, it will become harder for the Security Council to ignore them altogether. Conversely, if the Security Council – and above all the P3 – can signal a sincere openness to AU perspectives, their decisions likely would face less scepticism and criticism on the continent. Inter-institutional relations will always be complicated, particularly around fast-moving crises. But the better they work together, the more successful the two councils can be in reinforcing each other's efforts to prevent and end deadly conflict on the continent. For all their disputes and differences, that is a goal every member of both councils should be able to embrace.

**Addis Ababa/New York/Brussels, 25 June 2019**

Appendix A: UN and AU Peace Operations in Africa



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AU Endorsed Operations

**MNJTF – The Multinational Joint Task Force**  
Composed of troops from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, the AU-mandated MNJTF combats Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin. The UNSC noted its creation, but has not clearly endorsed it.

**Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel**  
Created to fight cross-border jihadi and criminal threats, the AU-endorsed force comprises troops from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. The Security Council welcomed but did not fully authorise it due to concerns about funding expectations.

## Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

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The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org). Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Algiers, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Mexico City, New Delhi, Rabat, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrian Development Agency, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, European Union Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, French Development Agency, French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, German Federal Foreign Office, Global Affairs Canada, Irish Aid, Iceland Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Principality of Liechtenstein, Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the UK Department for International Development, and the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

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**June 2019**

## Appendix C: Reports and Briefings on Africa since 2016

### Special Reports and Briefings

*Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, Special Report N°1, 14 March 2016 (also available in Arabic and French).

*Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action*, Special Report N°2, 22 June 2016.

*Counter-terrorism Pitfalls: What the U.S. Fight against ISIS and al-Qaeda Should Avoid*, Special Report N°3, 22 March 2017.

*Council of Despair? The Fragmentation of UN Diplomacy*, Special Briefing N°1, 30 April 2019.

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*Chad: Between Ambition and Fragility*, Africa Report N°233, 30 March 2016 (also available in French).

*Burundi: anatomie du troisième mandat*, Africa Report N°235, 20 May 2016 (only available in French).

*Katanga: Tensions in DRC's Mineral Heartland*, Africa Report N°239, 3 August 2016.

*The African Union and the Burundi Crisis: Ambition versus Reality*, Africa Briefing N°122, 28 September 2016 (also available in French).

*Boulevard of Broken Dreams: The "Street" and Politics in DR Congo*, Africa Briefing N°123, 13 October 2016.

*Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram*, Africa Report N°241, 16 November 2016 (also available in French).

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*Cameroon's Far North: A New Chapter in the Fight Against Boko Haram*, Africa Report N°263, 14 August 2018 (also available in French).

*Helping the Burundian People Cope with the Economic Crisis*, Africa Report N°264, 31 August 2018 (also available in French).

*Cameroon: Divisions Widen Ahead of Presidential Vote*, Africa Briefing N°142, 3 October 2018 (also available in French).

*Chad: Defusing Tensions in the Sahel*, Africa Report N°266, 5 December 2018 (also available in French).

*Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: How to Get to Talks?*, Africa Report N°272, 2 May 2019 (also available in French).

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*Making the Central African Republic's Latest Peace Agreement Stick*, Africa Report N°277, 18 June 2019 (also available in French).

*Running Out of Options in Burundi*, Africa Report N°278, 20 June 2019 (also available in French).

### Horn of Africa

*Ethiopia: Governing the Faithful*, Africa Briefing N°117, 22 February 2016.

*Sudan's Islamists: From Salvation to Survival*, Africa Briefing N°119, 21 March 2016.

*South Sudan's South: Conflict in the Equatorias*, Africa Report N°236, 25 May 2016.

*Kenya's Coast: Devolution Disappointed*, Africa Briefing N°121, 13 July 2016.

*South Sudan: Rearranging the Chessboard*, Africa Report N°243, 20 December 2016.

*Instruments of Pain (II): Conflict and Famine in South Sudan*, Africa Briefing N°124, 26 April 2017.

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<b>Kenneth Adelman</b> <b>Adnan Abu-Odeh</b> <b>HRH Prince Turki al-Faisal</b>	<b>Mong Joon Chung</b> <b>Sheila Coronel</b> <b>Pat Cox</b> <b>Gianfranco Dell'Alba</b>	<b>Miklós Németh</b> <b>Christine Ockrent</b> <b>Timothy Ong</b> <b>Roza Otunbayeva</b>
<b>Celso Amorim</b> <b>Oscar Arias</b> <b>Richard Armitage</b> <b>Diego Arria</b> <b>Zainab Bangura</b> <b>Nahum Barnea</b> <b>Kim Beazley</b> <b>Shlomo Ben-Ami</b>	<b>Jacques Delors</b> <b>Alain Destexhe</b> <b>Mou-Shih Ding</b> <b>Uffe Ellemann-Jensen</b> <b>Stanley Fischer</b> <b>Carla Hills</b> <b>Swanee Hunt</b> <b>Wolfgang Ischinger</b>	<b>Olara Otunnu</b> <b>Lord (Christopher) Patten</b> <b>Surin Pitsuwan</b> <b>Fidel V. Ramos</b> <b>Olympia Snowe</b> <b>Javier Solana</b>