

African Peace and Security Dialogue: Role of the Thabo Mbeki Foundation

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Abstract

The article discusses the role of a new actor in the African security system – the Thabo Mbeki Foundation. The Foundation promotes dialogue on peace and security in Africa, complements the existing security architecture, created primarily on the basis of the African Union. The author reveals the values of the new Dialogue whose key objectives are a clear framing of the current security challenges facing Africa; uprooting the causes and drivers of the conflicts in the continent – both endogenous and exogenous; developing the peace architecture; understanding the nature and character of the prevailing conditions in the Horn of Africa and West Africa, and whether the multilateral efforts can make a modest contribution to achieving lasting peace in these regions. In organizing the dialogue between governments and non-state actors, the Thabo Mbeki Foundation tries to foster a culture of collaboration that transcended political divides and national borders. The African Peace and Security Dialogue tries to fill a gap by providing a platform to bridge the multilateral efforts in the attempt that a continent-wide dialogue might serve as a nexus where the insights, strategies, and recommendations from other negotiation fora are being synthesised.

Keywords:

Security Dialogue, Africa, Thabo Mbeki Foundation, Security in Africa, African Governance Architecture, African Peace and Security Architecture, Africa's Renaissance

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In 2024 Johannesburg, South Africa, welcomed a historic inaugural session of the African Peace and Security Dialogue, that marked the commencement of a new journey aimed at bringing together sharp minds and providing an active platform to address the pressing peace and security challenges faced by Africa. The dialogue aimed to encourage critical engagement, robust debate, and most importantly, the generation of African-led solutions to African problems, and attracted an array of individuals with vast experience on matters of peace and security: committed combatants for the development of the African Continent, who placed themselves at the vanguard of this important and timely initiative.

The world remains in turmoil. We are witnessing the ongoing conflict in Gaza, political violence in Lebanon, clashes in Eastern Europe as well as the simmering potential nuclear threat in today's world (whereas only two nations in the world had "voluntarily" given up nuclear weapons for different reasons).

At the same time, while mindful of the global conflicts, the peoples of Africa posit that their continent has offered many lessons to global society. For example, South Africans and Namibians suffered equally egregious colonial punitive expeditions and starvation as those being suffered by many people now in the Middle East. Now Libya provides Africa with important lessons to be learned.

But while the aforementioned global reality continued to unfold, the purpose of the African Peace and Security Dialogue over the next days would be to focus on the continent, which remains riven by conflicts that continue to cause immense suffering amongst people.

The nature of war in Africa today – its totality, its brutality – inevitably impelled those involved to commit war crimes against

humanity, including potential genocides. Moreover, the impunity with which such wars are waged resulted in violating international law.

It is dispiriting that the African continent continues to face myriad problems, from climate crises, debt crises, civil wars and military takeovers, to name but a few, with the highest number of countries (six in total) suspended by the AU as a result thereof.

In many African countries the democratic dividend has not been extended to the ordinary citizenry, often leading to instability and violence, and the ongoing wars and conflicts in various parts of the continent are generating mass starvation, displacements, and famine, as evidenced in Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan (Hentz, 2013).

What this escalation of conflicts in various parts of the continent has shown, is that the AU Peace Architecture (Sousa, 2013) has appeared to be ineffective and rudderless (Abu Bakarr Bah, 2024). The AU Peace and Security Council, created almost 20 years ago, was envisaged to be the key institution in partnership with the UN Security Council to oversee a new era of dynamic, proactive engagement in building peace in Africa. It was intended to give true meaning to the principles of the Constitutive Act of the AU via fully functioning institutional processes, and yet, this institution seemed to be overwhelmed and unable to stem the tide of conflicts and wars.

Bearing this in mind, it should be understood that the dialogue was not an isolated event, but part of a broader initiative driven by the Thabo Mbeki Foundation to support the achievement of Africa's renaissance; representing their collective commitment to the promotion of democracy, good governance, human rights, and regional integration.

The intention would be that in time the Dialogue would grow into a central pillar for continental peace and security, bringing

together African leaders, scholars, policy-makers, and practitioners to engage in meaningful and impactful discussions that would have lasting consequences for the continent.

The context of the Dialogue was therefore clear – it had to start with the need to correctly define the problem, that is: Africa, so rich in diversity, culture, and natural resources, continues to face profound challenges in its pursuit of peace and security. Conflicts across the African landscape, be they internal, inter-state, or driven by external forces, have long undermined the progress towards prosperity. These conflicts are multifaceted, often rooted in colonial legacies, fuelled by political and economic instability, and exacerbated by high levels of poverty, corruption, and weak governance. The spillover effects of terrorism, organized crime, and external intervention add layers of complexity to the task ahead.

Africa was not and could not be a continent defined by its difficulties. Rather, it was a continent of potential, of resilience, and of hope. Africa's people's strength lay not only in their rich resources and geographical expanse, but also in their shared will to build a peaceful and prosperous future for themselves and generations to come. This is why Thabo Mbeki Foundation African Peace and Security Dialogue is so profoundly important. It appears not as a platform of cynicism and hesitancy, but one that seeks to gather Africans totally committed to the mission of creating a peaceful and prosperous continent.

Since its inception, the Thabo Mbeki Foundation (TMF) has been seeking to contribute meaningfully to Africa's development. Today, more than ever, TMF recognizes the

imperative of addressing the root causes of conflict and insecurity on the continent.

It was acknowledged that numerous foundational policies and documents had been put in place to that end, for example, of the African Union's Agenda 2063¹, a blueprint that seeks to stop the conflicts and harness the continent's resources for its development. Similarly, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16² seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all. Delegates' responsibility is not only to note these as mere aspirations, but to ensure their realisation as the continental collective.

Over time, the Thabo Mbeki Foundation has witnessed an increasing recognition of Africa's potential to resolve its own issues. However, the TMF has also seen the limitations imposed by weak continental and regional mechanisms, limited resources, and at times, the absence of fit-for-purpose leadership and political will. The TMF's objective is therefore to reverse this trend by building a robust platform for continuous dialogue, collaboration, and, ultimately, coordinated action.

Furthermore, the dialogue has been anchored in the recognition that no challenge to peace and security is purely local or isolated in today's interconnected world. Internal conflicts, terrorism, transnational organized crime, and external aggression all transcend borders and affect the continent as a whole (Gudeta Negera, 2022), and in some instances even pose threats to international peace.

The theme of 2024 inaugural dialogue, *Towards a Peaceful and Secure Africa: Challenges and Opportunities*, thus has encapsulated both the obstacles faced and the

¹ AU. Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. URL: <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview> (accessed 15.10.2024)

² UN. Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. URL: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16> (accessed 15.10.2024)

potential that must be harnessed to overcome them. It was a reminder that while the threats to peace and security has to be faced head-on, the opportunities presented by co-operation, innovation, and solidarity also has to be seized.

In organizing the dialogue, the Thabo Mbeki Foundation tries to foster a culture of collaboration that transcended political divides and national borders. As previously stated, robust frameworks are already in place: the African Peace and Security Architecture, the African Governance Architecture, and the African Continental Free Trade Area³, to name just a few. However, more is needed than the creation of frameworks. Frameworks have to be operationalized effectively, ensuring that they work for the development of Africa. This requires strong and committed leadership, political will, and a commitment to collective action.

At the same time, it needed to be acknowledged that achieving peace and security in Africa was not the exclusive responsibility of governments. Civil society, the private sector, academia, and the African diaspora all had vital roles to play. The African Peace and Security Dialogue would promote dialogue, not just between governments, but also among all stakeholders invested in the peaceful future of this continent. Partnerships had to be built across sectors, regions, and disciplines, leveraging the full spectrum of African expertise to develop innovative and sustainable solutions.

Now special focus on West Africa and the Horn of Africa (Cardoso, 2016) is particularly timely, with both regions having experienced

some of the most complex and protracted conflicts in recent years. These conflicts have claimed countless lives, displaced millions, and strained the resources of both national governments and international organizations. However these regions had also shown remarkable resilience, and there were lessons to be learned, both from the challenges they faced and from the innovative approaches to conflict resolution and peace-building that had emerged. At a minimum, this inaugural dialogue will add its voice on the most practicable ways of returning these regions to popular democracies and peace.

To this end, and during the dialogue, a capstone booklet was launched, which tells a story about a group of Africans led by President Mbeki, and dubbed the Capstone Report: *Defining the Crisis in the Sudans: Lessons from the African Union High-Level Panels for Sudan and South Sudan*⁴. The booklet aimed to offer support to the peoples of these countries to solve their strategic problems and might provide a foundation for the discussions on the Horn of Africa during the dialogue. In addition, and as an indication of the commitment to collaborations, the Book on the *Review of the Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa*⁵ was also launched.

The African Peace and Security Dialogue was not intended to function as an isolated event but was designed to complement the myriad other initiatives and gatherings focused on peace and security across the African Continent. These included such gatherings as the Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa, the African Union Summits on Peace and Security, the Aswan

³ AU. The African Continental Free Trade Area. URL: <https://au.int/en/african-continental-free-trade-area> (accessed 15.10.2024)

⁴ Capstone Report: Defining the Crisis in the Sudans: Lessons from the African Union High-Level Panels for Sudan and South Sudan. 2024. TMF. URL: <https://mbeki.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/TMF-Crisis-in-The-Sudans-Report-Digital.pdf> (accessed 15.10.2024)

⁵ Rukato, H. 2024. Tana at 10: Reflections on the 10 Years of the Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa. URL: <https://tanaforum.org/> (accessed 15.10.2024)

Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development (Sustainable Development in Africa, 2021; Cawthra, 2009), the Lomé Peace and Security Forum, and other regional gatherings. Each of these forums continues to play critical role in addressing specific dimensions of the peace and security landscape.

Within this context, the African Peace and Security Dialogue tries to fill a vital gap by providing a platform to bridge these efforts, in the attempt that a continent-wide dialogue, convened under the auspices of the Thabo Mbeki Foundation, might serve as a nexus where the insights, strategies, and recommendations from other conferences are being synthesised, thus enabling a more coordinated, practical, and unified approach to peace and security.

The dialogue is also designed to be a space where high-level discussions converged with grassroots experiences, where policymakers met practitioners, and where African solutions might be formulated based on shared knowledge and collective wisdom. This would ensure that the work done in other conferences will not be siloed but brought together to create a coherent, continent-wide framework for peacebuilding, with the aim of bringing dignity to the peoples of the continent by enabling them to solve their own problems, rather than relying on former colonial powers even to meet and have a conversation amongst themselves.

By complementing and collaborating with existing platforms, the intention was to strengthen the overall impact of African-led peace and security initiatives, ensuring that efforts were not duplicated but amplified. There is to be, collectively, a stronger commitment to cooperate for the achievement of the objectives of the AU Constitutive Act and Agenda 2063.

The Thabo Mbeki Foundation expresses its commitment to being at the forefront of Africa's renewal and to working with all

Africans in this regard, not only through the dialogue and other similar events, but also its programmes. Since its establishment in 2010, the Foundation has dedicated itself to supporting efforts aimed at the political, economic, cultural, and technological renaissance of Africa. The TMF's work is grounded in the belief that Africa's future lies in the hands of its people, and that through critical thinking, leadership, and dialogue, the continent's most pressing challenges might be addressed.

Importantly, South Africa's struggle against Apartheid was a struggle for all humanity, led by Africans throughout the Continent of Africa and the diaspora. It was no accident therefore that South Africa became the birthplace of the African Union, which in turn gave birth to the most concrete programmes aimed at Africa's Renaissance.

The Thabo Mbeki Foundation therefore recognises its responsibility to play a role in providing the platforms, the knowledge, and the networks necessary to catalyse Africa's Renaissance (Mbeki & Makgoba, 1999). The TMF is modestly positioned to do this, given its deep interest and knowledge of Africa's history, the convening power it enjoys, and the support it enjoys both from African and international stakeholders.

The essential question is not whether delegates have the capacity to address these issues – they do. The question is whether they have the will. Questions posed and a challenge delivered: “Do we, as African leaders, and citizens, have the will to prioritise peace and security? Do we have the courage to endow our actions with the same moral and political energy that so many of the ancestors used in the struggle against colonialism and apartheid? If we do, then the dialogue had to become more than a meeting of minds – it had to be the starting point for an African-led movement towards sustainable peace and security.”

The hope expressed is that at the end of the dialogue delegates would have been able to provide a clear framing of the current security challenges facing our continent; understand the causes and drivers of the conflicts in our continent – both endogenous and exogenous causes and drivers; clearly assess the peace architecture in our continent, and whether same is fit-for-purpose; have a clearer understanding of the nature and character of the prevailing conditions in the Horn of Africa and West Africa, and whether the multilateral efforts can make

a modest contribution to achieving lasting peace in these regions; and lastly, whether we can, amongst ourselves, cooperate in devising practical strategies and pathways towards lasting peace.

In 2024 the Chairperson of the TMF expressed confidence that their expertise, passion, and dedication would help make the dialogue a resounding success and a powerful force for change in Africa. As the renowned African writer Ben Okri stated, “The happiness of Africa is in its nostalgia for the future, and its dreams of a golden age.”⁶

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ДИАЛОГ ПО ВОПРОСАМ МИРА И БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ В АФРИКЕ: РОЛЬ ФОНДА ТАБО МБЕКИ

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Аннотация: В статье обсуждается роль нового актора в системе африканской безопасности – Фонда Табо Мбеки. Фонд содействует диалогу по вопросам мира и безопасности в Африке, дополняет существующую архитектуру безопасности, созданную, в первую очередь, на основе Африканского союза. Автор раскрывает ценности нового Диалога, основными целями которого являются четкое определение текущих проблем безопасности, с которыми сталкивается Африка, искоренение причин и движущих сил конфликтов на континенте – как эндогенных, так и экзогенных, разработка архитектуры мира, понимание природы и характера действующих конфликтогенных факторов в районе Африканского Рога и Западной Африки, а также того, могут ли многосторонние усилия внести вклад в достижение прочного мира в этих субрегионах. Расширяя диалог государств и негосударственных акторов, Фонд Табо Мбеки способствует формированию культуры сотрудничества, которая выходит за рамки политических разногласий и национальных границ. Африканский диалог по вопросам мира и безопасности пытается преодолеть противоречия, предлагая платформу

⁶ Okri, B. 1996. *Birds of Heaven*. London: Phoenix.

для объединения многосторонних усилий в попытке сделать общеконтинентальный диалог связующим звеном, где синтезируются идеи, стратегии и рекомендации других переговорных площадок.

Ключевые слова: диалог по безопасности, Африка, Фонд Табо Мбеки, безопасность в Африке, архитектура африканского управления, архитектура мира и безопасности в Африке, возрождение Африки

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