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## World Peace Foundation

The World Peace Foundation, an operating foundation affiliated solely with The Fletcher School at Tufts University, aims to provide intellectual leadership on issues of peace, justice and security. It believes that innovative research and teaching are critical to the challenges of making peace around the world, and should go hand-in-hand with advocacy and practical engagement with the toughest issues. To respond to organized violence today, we not only need new instruments and tools—we need a new vision of peace. Our challenge is to reinvent peace.

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# Clashing Measures of Legitimacy in African Security Sector Reform: Implications for Efforts to Protect Civilians

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## KEY FINDINGS

- Across national and local contexts, some principles that ground the legitimacy of governance structures hold despite significant variations in expectations and experiences. Foremost among them is the imperative to protect civilians from violence, especially from mass atrocities. This is a norm with deep roots in Africa, and African ways of framing the issue sometimes have different emphases to international frameworks.
- However, in the African context, today's expectations for protection combined with new patterns of violence against civilians expose gaps between international and local experiences of the actors, contexts and vulnerabilities involved in risks of mass atrocities.
- To maintain the legitimacy of the anti-atrocity consensus, there is a need to re-imagine protection within security sector reform endeavors, including:
  - Within governance systems that function on the basis of loyalty networks;
  - Within regional conflict and power dynamics;
  - As a defining measure of success for all peace missions, including African Union missions conceived as enforcement/combat operations undertaken by coalitions of the willing;
  - Within new threats that emerge in semi-democratic states, especially in relation to elections and political militias;
  - By embracing the primacy of the political at the African Union, especially focused on upholding and implementing norms and principles already adopted by the AU, which includes protection of civilians.

## Study Overview

This briefing draws on research conducted by area experts in support of the World Peace Foundation research program on African peace missions. The project, requested by the African Union, charts an agenda for peace in Africa, focusing on how the African Union can implement its norms and use its instruments to prevent and resolve armed conflicts. It consists of detailed case studies and cross-cutting research, and consultations with leading experts, peacekeepers, and mediators. Authors used a range of methodologies, including interviews, theoretical, statistical and case study research. Key insights are drawn from papers by: Mulugeta Gebrehiwot, Ann Fitz-Gerald, Solomon Dersso, Noel Twagiramungu, Dyan Mazurana, Alex de Waal and Bridget Conley-Zilkic.

Today, the consensus against widespread and systematic violence against civilians or mass atrocities holds despite notable headline examples of conflicts that have resulted in high number of civilian deaths, and competing goals that emerge as part of the war against terror. While strong states directing violence against their own citizens remain the most acute threat in terms of scale of mass atrocities, emerging trends suggest new contexts and vulnerabilities.

## Re-imagining protection within governance systems that function on the basis of loyalty networks

Loyalty rather than legitimacy better captures the nature of allegiance and the actual functioning of power relations in African governance models. Two such models are the political marketplace and liberation movements in power. In many countries in Africa and the Greater Middle East, governance is better understood as what Alex de Waal calls “the political marketplace,” defined as a system of governance run on the basis of personal transactions in which political services and allegiances are exchanged for material reward in a competitive manner. Violence in such systems occurs with dismal regularity as a mechanism of bargaining. Attacking civilians is a tactic used by subordinate players to stake claims or bargain up their price, to damage a rival’s constituency or claim, or as the product of error when a political business manager misjudges the market or misreads his rival.

Another model of African governance is that of liberation movements in power. While liberators in power also commonly adopt political business models, they tend to be considerably more stable and concerned with the public good, especially economic development, than the more deregulated political marketplace systems of fragile states. In these countries, ruling parties arise from armed liberation struggle, giving rise to consolidated military-political vanguards that control power for an extended period. Examples include Ethiopia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe: in all cases the government, ruling party and army are interwoven, sometimes seamlessly, and sometimes with artificial boundaries between them. In such cases, the allegiance of individuals and groups within the population to the ruling parties impedes political liberalization. What develops instead are client-patron relationships with the ruling party.

Despite the considerable differences in the abilities, programs and goals of leaders in the contexts of a political marketplace or party-structured state, both issue warnings that where most policy prescriptions are aimed at a coherent, institutionalized state, with a measure of autonomy from social forces, the reality of power relations is filtered through patronage or party-based loyalties. In terms of the vulnerability of civilians to violence, clearly the latter offers greater protection from mass atrocities, but it opens new challenges surrounding the possibility of leadership change, discussed in more depth below.

## Re-imagining protection within regional conflict and power dynamics

Reviewing the dynamics of interstate support for armed movements and cross-border military actions and comparing findings with established conflict datasets, research led by Noel Twagiramungu reveals the previously unacknowledged extent to which armed competition and contestation among states emerges as an important feature of the African political landscape. One of the striking features of this new analysis is the extent to which neighborly engagement in peace processes—both conflict mediation and also peace support operations—reflects earlier patterns of political-military involvement. Hence, conflict resolution must be seen not only as an internal matter for the country concerned, but

also as a mediation of the political interests of neighbors.

The involvement of neighbors is double-edged sword: when the neighbors' interests are in alignment or they have been resolved through a process of regional mediation, a resolution to the internal conflict is far more likely than when those neighbors have conflicting interests. The neighbors involved in peace missions (political and military) already have a stake in the country concerned. This may strengthen their ability to influence the outcome of the process. However, it also means that there is a greater risk that their involvement is not impartial.

### **Re-imagining protection as a defining measure of success for all peace missions, including African Union missions conceived as offensive or coalitions of the willing**

While protection of civilian (PoC) mandates are now almost universal in peacekeeping and peace missions, several challenges arise in terms of the actual work of reducing harms.

- In the African context, neighbors' partisan interests in conflict outcomes color not only mediation efforts, but also peace missions, as neighbors frequently deploy as peacekeepers;
- Africa has a comparative advantage in conflict prevention, including the AU's practice of setting up high-level panels of former or serving heads of state, who can intervene with the key protagonists to mitigate risks of conflict. These mechanisms are under-valued and under-utilized in comparison to military peace missions. They should be supported, and principles of civilian protection inserted into their mandates and practices;
- There is a dearth of shared doctrine and practices amongst African militaries today, most of which inherited their core posture and principles from former colonial rulers. This has specific consequence for protection of civilians during deployments;
- While AU peace missions commonly adapt UN peacekeeping practices, these do not cover the wider range of scenarios into which AU forces

are deployed, specifically in counter-insurgency, counter-terrorist and intelligence/surveillance-led targeted operations, such as in Somalia, Mali (briefly) and against Boko Haram in Nigeria. This indicates the need for both the AU's scenarios for its Standby Force to be revised and for its peace operations doctrine to be developed. Enforcement operations identify an enemy to be neutralized as the highest priority, which shapes the nature, scale and measure of success for operations, and can be to the detriment of civilian protection;

- Even in more traditionally understood peacekeeping missions, there remain considerable discrepancies among how the now ubiquitous PoC mandates are prioritized, understood and enacted by forces on the ground, with particular lapses at the most crucial moments: when civilians directly face an acute threat;
- Regardless of how well mandated, trained and resourced, peacekeepers cannot effectively provide protection to the size and range of civilian populations at risk across the continent. Understanding the means by which civilians protect themselves, and fashioning support for the most effective of these measures can increase the protective impact of peace mission efforts.

### **Re-imagining protection within the context of new threats that emerge in semi-democratic states, especially in relation to elections and political militias**

Today, mass atrocities are most likely to occur in states that are neither fully democratic nor fully autocratic. Elections in such contexts have become more intensively contested and even violently disputed. Not all leadership changes are contested in the same way and there is currently a dearth of principles to help guide policy through the maze of potential outcomes. The African Union has clearly articulated principled position on unconstitutional changes of government, especially in relation to military coups, with response mechanisms including condemnation and imposing sanctions, suspension from activities of the AU, denials of visas, transport and communications, and asset freezes. It also has preventative and early-intervention mechanisms.

However, as is visible in Burundi (2015-2016), Egypt (2011), Côte d'Ivoire (2010), Guinea (2009), and Kenya (2007-2008), today's scenarios of contested leadership changes offer several more complex scenarios that are dangerous for civilians. The international community, including the African Union, are currently poorly equipped with the principles, norms and response mechanisms for the wider range of scenarios that are becoming increasingly common, having viewed 'elections' as a cure rather than the starting point for a new set of challenges. Among these scenarios are contexts where elected leaders are pushed out of power following mass protests, the military is involved in efforts to amend constitutions (a 'democratic' variant of the military coup), incumbents refuse to relinquish power after losing elections, and civilian leaders amend their constitutions to remain in power.

Further, notable among several of these cases of recent high-level violence against civilians in electoral contexts are the roles played by armed units with loyalty to a political faction or particular leader. These special armed groups introduce yet another challenge into security sector reform, which treats the formal national military as the key institution for interventions. Across the board in Africa, political militias aligned with elite factions are responsible for an increasing share of violence.

## Conclusion

Protecting civilians from violence, especially mass atrocities, is a point of considerable consensus among the priorities of international actors and local populations, and it defines the minimal level of protection that informs legitimacy. However, the tools developed by the international community to help prevent, mitigate and halt such violence are predicated on an understanding of the state, key actors, and contexts that misconceives emerging scenarios of vulnerability. At the heart of all protection efforts is the need to reform the security sector. The prospects for effective reform are maximized when conducted in line with the realities of loyalty, political and conflict dynamics, the scenarios into which African forces are deployed, and the emergence of

new contexts and actors involved in violent scenarios. Security sector reform (SSR) can only be successful and sustainable when it is undertaken in relation to the core security concerns and interests of principal political actors in a country. Failing this, SSR either obscures the challenges outlined above or even increases the likelihood of violence.

The African Union has been a leading actor in defining the principles, mechanisms and actions that constitute the continent's commitment to improving collective security. It, together with the broader international community, can expand these efforts by centralizing protection of civilians, but new analysis, principles and practices based on today's realities are required to close the gap between an expectation for protection and the reality of violence.

## Recommendations

- 'Primacy of the political': civilian protection, as with all peace- and conflict-related activities, is principally a political activity. This entails upholding norms (including PoC), taking regional and local ownership of peace processes, and ensuring that military peace operations are subject to political oversight and conducted with political objectives in mind.
- Analysis of the specific political economies of conflict-affected countries, using the dynamic model of the political marketplace, to understand likely risks.
- Peacemaking should be conducted in the regional context, with a focus on engaging the neighbors in pre-mediation period.
- The principle of civilian protection should be prioritized by all peace missions, with the practices of protection developed in relation to understanding how civilians protect themselves.
- Stronger principles to guide international responses to unconstitutional changes of government, including forms of electoral manipulation, need to be articulated and adhered to.