Peace, Security and Stability in Africa

Remarks

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In mapping the new zones of conflict across Africa, one finds a striking correlation with the decline of democracy. It should come as no surprise. As democracy fails to deliver, as democratic institutions become weaker, elections less credible, and leaders more corrupt, so too do insurrections gain support, military adventurers find opportunity, and political, religious and ethnic cleavages become inflamed. Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Chad, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Central Africa Republic, Cameroon, Eastern Congo, Mozambique—all fit this pattern. Peace, security, and stability prevail in many countries that may or may not be democracies, ranging from Rwanda to Ghana. But where democracy has failed, sometimes in the face of conflict, even greater conflict has ensued.

These countries share other characteristics. They are poor, but rich in natural resources. Outside powers have often got involved, providing arms, spreading disinformation and propaganda, and profiting from the exploitation of natural resources. Hundreds of thousands of lives have been lost. They have generated massive waves of refugees and internally displaced persons. Their economies have suffered enormously. Meanwhile, legitimate foreign investment will flee, development will wither, and the contagion of instability will spread.

Unfortunately, neither African-led, nor international interventions have been successful in addressing conflict, whether it's ECOWAS or MINUSMA, IGAD or MONUSCO. Even Wagner has been having troubles, and the best the US may do is send Bancroft International to the rescue. Conflicts raging in other parts of the world, particularly Ukraine and Gaza, have distracted what meager attention the world might pay to these African crises, although the scale of deaths and displacement, with all due respect, are certainly much higher.

One should also map the zones of peace. Along the coast of West Africa, although political tensions are evident, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire have emerged from conflict in the last two decades. Likewise, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda in East Africa, and most of Southern Africa remain conflict-free. Political upheaval in countries such as Zimbabwe,

Angola, Burundi, Senegal, and Guinea may be cause for concern, but have not erupted into large scale violence yet. It would behoove us to examine how the peace and stability in these countries might be preserved and strengthened.

But how might conflicts be resolved, future conflicts be prevented, and peace, security and stability be insured? The answers are obvious, but much easier said than done. The African state must be strengthened, corruption rooted out, democratic governance adhered to, and human rights respected. Where governments fail to provide security and economic benefits, they lose popular support; where security forces extort civilians and commit human rights abuses, resistance builds; where citizens' dignity and vote is not respected, where sovereignty is imposed by force or manipulation, where they cannot freely express themselves in the media or trade unions or business associations or political parties or other civil society outlets, then eventually they will likely resort to other means to make their demands heard. Repression might work for a long time, but not forever. Civil society must be allowed to flourish, independent media left free, and political activity unhindered. Constitutions must be respected, and the two-term rule reinstated. More often than not, where this has not happened, coups and conflict have followed. All this requires resources and political will, which is too often in short supply. Yet so-called "kinetic" responses to conflict have almost universally failed, while being far more expensive. The interests of political elites need to better correspond with those of the grassroots.

As is true throughout the world, there can be no doubt that most Africans want to live in peace, security, and stability, and to enjoy the social and economic benefits that come along with it. Peace and democracy go together, and reinforce each other. Thus, in the many countries now relatively free of conflict, the same prescription of shoring up the state, good governance, democracy and human rights will be the best insurance that peace and stability is sustained. As is the case in much of the world today, Africa is facing some grim realities when it comes to peace and stability. Yet Africans have successfully persevered through some daunting challenges in the past, and I know it can be done again.