

Democratic governance and peace:

Two sides of the same coin?

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THE current focus on Africa's proposed regeneration, and the renewed attention paid to Africa's prospects by external actors, prompted by such figures as Robert Mugabe and Laurent Gbagbo, to no lesser degree than Thabo Mbeki and Olusegun Obasanjo, has presented opportunities for policy interventions on peace, security, and development to an extent not equalled since the dawn of independence in the 1960s. Central to any thinking about Africa's future are the termination of conflicts and the cultivation of enduring and robust democracies on the continent, to accompany – or, perhaps more accurately, inspire – its still elusive economic development. Here a case is made for the simultaneous pursuit of democracy and peace: democracy as peace as a means of achieving higher levels of political stability; investigating the links between democracy and peace in the light of new ways of thinking, internationally and on the continent; and highlighting those features of democracy that are conducive to peace. This includes an emphasis on the importance of democratic institutions and norms. Hope is instilled by the current arrangements entered into by regional bodies on the continent, and the contributions to this effort that stand to be made by the New Plan for Africa's Development (NEPAD). This paper draws on a variety of literature on and documented experiences of peace-building and democracy on the continent.

Various methods have been used to explore the purported connection between democracy and peace.¹ They have largely centred on those aspects of relations among states that may result in their peaceful behaviour towards each other. Much has been written about the 'democratic peace thesis' (DPT), the notion that established democracies do not go to war with each other. Its intra-state counterpart, the idea that states managed in a democratic fashion are less prone to violent civil conflict, has not received the same degree of attention, at least not in respect of the African continent.

Attempts to link democracy and peace can be traced back at least to Immanuel Kant, the 18th-century German philosopher. Subsequent to that, numerous other perceptions of democracy's peace-inducing credentials were formulated; these were challenged especially when they were linked to capitalist economic systems, among others by Leninists. Woodrow Wilson resurrected the notion of 'democratic peace' in the course of his attempts to convince the US Congress to join World War 1. It is widely acknowledged that there are easily as many interpretations of the concept of democracy as there are sovereign states. For the immediate purpose of highlighting the interaction between democracy and peace-building, however, the former will be interrogated on the basis of both its *virtues* and its *features*; that

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is to say, both its normative and its descriptive properties relevant to its efficacy for sustaining peace. The elements that democracy is most feted for include: electoral politics (a central feature of representative democracy); direct participation (participatory democracy); negotiation as a preferred means of conflict settlement; the protection of civil and political liberties (liberal democracy); and, equality of political, economic, and social opportunity.

The DPT and the notion that democratic states are domestically more peaceful are largely based on the same premises, many of which coincide with those mentioned above, revolving around the central contention that the principles of democratic governance preclude, or at least substantially reduce, the propensity for disputes between two or more parties to escalate into open, violent conflict. DPT's relevance is superseded in contemporary Africa, however, owing to the high prevalence of intra-state conflict on the continent. There have been a disturbing number of civil wars (albeit often involving neighbouring states) in an era notable for the general absence of inter-state wars globally.

At the time of writing, there were at least six highly publicised civil conflicts on the continent, namely those in Burundi, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and Sudan. Sierra Leone has most recently emerged, with much celebration, from relentless domestic conflict, and is attempting to piece itself back together by meting out justice and seeking reconciliation. Angola and Mozambique are aiming for the same goals.

A study of the applicability of 'democratic governance as peace' in Africa necessitates a step back from any ready assumptions of the links between democracy and peace. This should be taken in order to uncover the very basis of such a contention by examining the underlying features of democracy and peace, and the ways in which these two qualities can be said to reinforce each other, or indeed, work at cross purposes. Such an approach is based on certain premises – among them the renewed enthusiasm for seeing security in Africa as more than the external security of the state, but also, more importantly, as *human security*, as well as the seemingly global acknowledgement of a broader conception of democracy to include more than just periodic elections.²

Human security entails eliminating threats to the security of individuals, groups, and societies, in addition to that of states. While human security is threatened, as in a conflict situation, there is neither democracy – an opportunity for exercising life-enhancing choices - nor can there be peace. As shown all too clearly in many African situations, this represents a moment of supreme weakness for the state, as factions seek sponsors, internally or externally, for their campaigns of violence and intimidation. In this way, questions about suitable forms of government *within* states have been extended to the relations *between* states; and democracy must be examined as a force for peace not merely between states, but between substate actors across states, and between substate actors and states. Congolese rebels solicited the assistance of Rwanda and Uganda; Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front found support in Liberia's Charles Taylor; and it is rumoured that the Sudan

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People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) has found it in Museveni's Uganda, who is himself wary of alleged Sudan government support for the Lord's Resistance Army in the north of his country. Security has increasingly come to be seen as more than the state's capacity to defend itself against aggression, as human insecurity has emerged as the main threat to state security – a threat from within. Consequently,

human security is much less about procuring arms and deploying troops than it is about strengthening the social and environmental fabric of societies and improving their governance. To avoid the instability and breakdown now witnessed in countless areas around the globe, a human security policy must take into account a complex web of social, economic, environmental and other factors.³

Supporters of a broader definition of democracy aim to broaden the perception of democracy's efficacy beyond just representation to equality of opportunity and direct participation, in as much as these lead to human social and economic development.

‘Peace’, furthermore, is more than just the absence of violent conflict – it has come to be seen as encompassing such concepts as ‘tolerance’ and ‘justice’. Peace-building, therefore, is more than merely the reconstruction of conflict-ridden societies, and the ushering in or reconstitution of governance institutions. It is about addressing the underlying causes of conflict in such a way that conflicts will not recur – ‘tolerance’ and ‘justice’ being just two ways of ameliorating these underlying causes.

But are democracy and peace truly compatible at all times? What are the specific features of democracies that incline them towards peace? Which quality, if any, is to be preferred in the event of a divergence of interests? Convincing arguments, backed with empirical evidence, have been put forward to challenge the view that democracy and peace are compatible at all times.⁴ One such argument centres on the inherent propensity for conflict in the operation of democratic practice – conflict that would be difficult to contain in post-conflict situations, especially in winner-takes-all situations. However, formal studies into ‘democratic civil peace’, such as that conducted by Hegre, et al,⁵ reveal a close correlation between democracy and civil peace, if peace is to be lasting and durable. Certainly, autocracies may also be peaceful, but exhibit a peace ‘which may be characterised as the peace of a zoo’.⁶ The Hegre study locates the crucial import of democracy as a peace-building mechanism in stable, well-developed, and well-evolved institutions. While autocratic regimes may also be peaceful, through conditions of repression, democratic regimes provide the best environment for consolidating political institutions of democratic government, making it less likely for states to slide back into civil war. Intermediate regimes, on the other hand, are more prone to civil wars. The Hegre study finds that both the level of democracy and the stage of transition of government contribute to the likelihood of civil conflict.

Subregional institutions such as SADC and ECOWAS are aware that peace and democratic government are two sides of the same coin

In addition to the need for strong democratic institutions, a case can also be made for the central relevance of norms in the practice and maintenance of democratic government. In an ideal world, such norms would precede institutions, and fortify them. The more common reality, however, is the imposition of hallmark democratic institutions, such as parliaments and elections, on post-conflict societies ill-equipped with the normative foundations to utilise and sustain such institutions. Some democrats might argue that the pre-existence of such institutions facilitates the learning of the requisite norms. Where these institutions are poorly managed and supported, however, they may do more harm than good. Regional organisations have a role to play in both the cultivation of norms and the creation and maintenance of institutions, and there is already a growing realisation among them, as illustrated in their security and governance instruments, where these exist, of the primacy of political, social, and economic factors in addition to military factors in influencing human security.

Notwithstanding their poor implementation records, subregional institutions, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) are aware that peace and democratic government are two sides of the same coin. By including provisions for 'free and fair elections' and the protection of human rights in their democracy and peace and security instruments, the leadership of these groupings display a sagacity in matters pertaining to peace and human security that is, unfortunately, betrayed by their members' actions in the domestic arena.⁷ Nonetheless, the acknowledgement of the role to be played by the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in continental peace-keeping and peace-building is enshrined in the provisions establishing the peace and security council of the African Union (AU). The AU, in its *Draft protocol relating to the mechanism for conflict prevention, management, and resolution in Africa*, also affirms its 'aware[ness] of the fact that good governance, the rule of law and sustainable development are essential for peace, security and conflict prevention'.

It is necessary, then, to highlight those features of democracy that are especially conducive to peace, by way of setting the boundaries of the 'democratic government as peace' thesis. It is necessary to guard against the 'lazy' assumption that 'democracy = peace'. Paris suggests that we begin from the opposite premise: that 'creating a stable market democracy is a tumultuous, conflict-ridden, and lengthy process, particularly in the fragile political environment of a war-shattered state'.⁸ Such states are typically incapable of coping with the level and intensity of social competition that attend democratic practice. The relationship between peace and democracy is thus more nuanced than is commonly believed. It is not a self-evident pairing, particularly in post-conflict societies.

'Democratic governance as peace' is a well-marketed commodity in the international arena. Whether the advertisement is paid for by the international financial institutions in order to smooth the path for efficient economic activity, or by African statesmen, sales are still minimal. A fillip for the 'governance as peace' theory

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in the African context, and consequently for the implicit link between human security (and consequently state security) and democratic governance, is the OAU/AU's modified stance on the inviolability of state borders.⁹ However, AU intervention can only be relied upon in 'grave circumstances', which include such extremes as genocide, coups, and crimes against humanity. This leaves little hope for intervention in cases where the integrity of elections is in doubt, for example. Making allowances for such interventions is itself debatable, however.

The extent to which peace in Africa, political and social, is a product largely of the satisfaction of material or economic – as opposed to purely political and social – needs cannot be underestimated. For example, Sierra Leone's rebels were placated by the allocation of the ministry of natural resources to the leadership of the Revolutionary United Front. Given that most conflicts in Africa are resource- and territory-based, the entry point for peace-building as management is therefore evident: securing peace and ensuring its sustainability is brought about by efficiently managing power and resources, so that the ends of justice and equitable distribution are met. This is also the point at which the coincidence of peace-building and democratic governance is most readily discernible: the management of power and resources in a manner that is efficient and transparent, and invites broad-based participation by all stakeholders.

Countries emerging from conflict situations typically have to deal with the reallocation of power in society, in order to secure lasting and sustainable peace – whether conflict has been ended by military victory or negotiated settlement. The close relationship between peace-building and democratic governance can be seen more clearly in this form. Owing to the interdependence of the two, it is clear how influencing one of these factors affects the other. The need for principles of good governance to be incorporated into peace-making and subsequent (ie peace-keeping and peace-building) operations, owing to the close linkages that exist between peace-making/-keeping/-building and establishing governance norms and values, has been highlighted.¹⁰

Another way of presenting the link between democracy and peace in intra-state relations is by charting the course of power from the closing stages of conflict to the eventual establishment of broad-based participatory governance that is transparent, accountable, and representative. A concomitant of this is tracing the outlets in society for the peaceful contestation of political office, and – more importantly, it may be argued – the expression of grievances, political and other, in a manner that invites engagement and competition on an equal basis among citizens, and between citizens and their elected representatives.

In the words of the former chair of the OAU, Salim A Salim, '... democracy really means the ability to tolerate one another, the ability to propound different views without being antagonistic. Indeed, this is part of the process of conflict prevention in our continent.'¹¹ That is to say, by ensuring 'built-in' conflict prevention mechanisms in the way in which a country is run, the chances of peace prevailing appear much greater. Such mechanisms include freedom of expression, with the

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attendant responsibility not to indulge in hate speech; and the freedom to form political parties, and the attendant responsibility not to base them exclusively upon race, ethnicity or religion. There should also be institutions that audit governments' behaviour, among others.

In the African experience, democracy, in a narrow sense, has not penetrated the complexities of the equitable distribution of national wealth and the challenge of securing peaceful societies. The enfranchisement of those previously marginalised is not sufficient to ensure economic opportunity, as is evident in the South African case, among others. While South Africa is said to enjoy a robust democracy, in terms of its bill of rights, government auditing institutions, and a vibrant civil society, this has not translated into social peace. Violence remains a feature of social interactions. It may be argued that this is more a problem of a consolidation or a deepening of democracy – taking democracy further than merely electoral democracy – than a problem with democracy itself.

The depth of the relationship between democracy and peace is clearly evident in the manner in which 'peace-building' is conceived of by the United Nations (UN). The term itself was first used by Boutros Boutros-Ghali, during his term as secretary-general of the UN, to denote 'action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict'.¹² The statement, *Agenda for peace*, in which this term made its debut represented a watershed in UN approaches to human security, and concomitantly, state sovereignty. Peace-building typically includes such actions as disarming, demobilising, and reintegrating former combatants; resettling displaced persons; reforming security forces, civil services, judiciaries, and other government institutions; overseeing transitions; and disseminating information about human rights.

Post-conflict peacebuilding, according to the Consultation of African Scholars arranged under the auspices of the International Peace Academy (IPA) and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) in 1999, 'is also a form of preventive diplomacy which aims to address the socio-economic and political roots of a conflict to achieve nothing less than *the political reconstruction of the state and the revitalisation of its institutions and governance* (italics inserted)'.¹³

Governance, the manner in which power is managed, and more particularly democratic governance, also fits the mould of preventive diplomacy by building into society's institutions the *capacity* to manage change without resorting to violence. These built-in non-violent solutions include broad-based representation and participation in government, especially inclusive of the formerly marginalised; negotiation as a preferred means of dispute resolution; the guarantees of transparency that should accompany democratic governance; the responsibility of accountability that elected officials have to their constituents; the free and unfettered dissemination of information; guarantees of the protection of human rights, including those of minorities; and the efficient and equitable distribution of re-

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sources. The elements included and excluded here in what constitutes good governance are of course very selective, and open to contestation.

It is here that the contributions of foreign actors become important, and by implication, the New Plan for Africa's Development (NEPAD), as the proposed key platform of interaction between Africa and the west. While such contributions may prove decisive in the sustainable implementation of peace-building and governance programmes, they may, if misplaced or mistimed, do more harm than good. There is thus a need for NEPAD contributions in this regard to be conflict-sensitive. In particular, the NEPAD founding document calls for contributions that enhance:

- long-term, sustainable development;
- African institutional capacity to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts; and
- leadership on the continent.

NEPAD's implicit emphasis on the supposed links between governance and economic benefit, to a lesser extent than on those between governance and peace – if African governments practise good governance, then they will gain economic assistance – is a rather tenuous premise on which to base the future development of the entire continent. A number of problems with this approach are apparent: there is not enough emphasis given to 'democracy as peace'; and there is a lack of emphasis on routes to be followed in peace-building that could impact on the longer-term prospects of democracy in post-conflict African societies – in all, a distinct underemphasis of the importance of democracy for its own sake is discernible.

The bottom line is that democracy must be pursued for its inherent merits; only then will it be unfettered from the chains of self-interest and factionalism. It has been shown that it is often the *manner* in which democracy is propagated – the installation of 'democratic governments', and the premature holding of elections – that presents opportunities for things to go wrong; not democracy itself. South Africa must take care in its own brand of liberal internationalism¹⁴ not to alienate others by presenting itself as a 'prime example', or by styling itself (even unwittingly) as an 'emissary of the west'. By the same token, great care must be exercised by donors, and sponsors of peace-building exercises, not to exacerbate already fragile post-conflict conditions.

As with most theories, the argument for 'governance as peace' is not watertight. Transitions (whether democratic or autocratic) are prone to outbreaks of conflict, owing to the fact that political change 'deconsolidates' political institutions, thereby heightening the risk of civil war.¹⁵ This may give rise to the misinformed interpretation that, in certain cases, a trade-off between 'democratic governance' and 'peace' may be expedient, even necessary. However, while the short-term effects of transition may be the same, regardless of the direction of the transition, the long-term effects are decidedly different. And, while, transition brings with it a higher likelihood of civil war, transition towards autocracy brings with it the higher likelihood of a return to the intermediate state and more instability.¹⁶ Hence democracy and peace are not interchangeable, and if the end result sought is

greater human freedom for development and improved life chances – the aims of the NEPAD – then both must be pursued simultaneously.

Endnotes

- ¹ See Bruce Russett, *Grasping the democratic peace: principles for a post-Cold War world*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993. Approaches vary in their emphasis on the peaceful credentials of democracy, citing, respectively, the importance of institutions, public opinion, and perception. These elements cannot always be readily distinguished, however.
- ² United Nations Development Programme, *Human development report 2002*.
- ³ Michael Renner, Transforming security, in World Bank, *State of the world*, Washington, 1997. Quoted in Rocklyn Williams, Managing regional security, in Institute for Global Dialogue, *The IGD guide to the Southern African Development Community*, 2001.
- ⁴ Roland Paris, Peacebuilding and the limits of liberal internationalism, *International Security* 22 (2), Fall, 1997, pp 54–89. Reprinted in Michael E Brown et al (eds), *Nationalism and ethnic conflict*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, revised edition, 2001.
- ⁵ Håvard Hegre, Tanja Ellingsen, Scott Gates, Nils Petter Gleditsch, 2001. Towards a democratic civil peace? Democracy, political change, and civil war, 1816-1992. *American Political Science Review*, 95 (1), pp 33–48.
- ⁶ *Ibid*, p 44.
- ⁷ Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Eyadema Ngassingbe of Togo (to name just two) whose democratic credentials have become increasingly questionable, are both signatories of their respective regions' far-reaching peace and security instruments.
- ⁸ *Ibid*.
- ⁹ The newly established AU has gone a step further in mandating its membership to intervene across national boundaries where genocide is perpetrated, and other grave violations of human rights occur.
- ¹⁰ Timothy M Shaw, Beyond post-conflict peacebuilding: what links to sustainable development and human security?, *International Peacekeeping*, 3 (2), Summer 1996, ed Jeremy Giniifer. Frank Cass: London. See also Michael W Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, Building peace: challenges and strategies after civil war. Research report for the World Bank Group, 1999, http://econ.Worldbank.org/files/13206_DSBuildingPeace.pdf, accessed 20.12.02.
- ¹¹ Salim A Salim, African conflicts : their management, resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction. DPMF occasional paper, 1, Development Policy Management Forum, 2002.
- ¹² Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 1992. *An agenda for peace: preventive diplomacy, peace-making and peace-keeping*. Report of the secretary-general pursuant to the state-

ment adopted by the summit meeting of the security council on 31 January 1992, <http://www.un.org/Docs/SG/agpeace.html>, accessed 21.11.02.

¹³ International Peace Academy and Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, *War, peace, and reconciliation in Africa*, November-December 1999, Dakar and Saly, Senegal.

¹⁴ A term given to the US foreign policy cornerstone of propagating democracy abroad, especially during the Clinton administration; later also attributed to Tony Blair's foreign policy.

¹⁵ Hegre et al, p 34.

¹⁶ Ibid.