

In 1998, international attention was directed to Africa. President Clinton's tour of six countries in March began the media spotlight on the continent. Clinton apologised to Rwanda for failing to respond to the genocide and praised Africa's 'new leaders' for their political and economic success. He left extolling the beginnings of a new 'African renaissance'. Clinton's whirlwind tour was followed by a visit from Kofi Annan, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, in May who also covered vast ground. Annan's visit followed his report written in April on 'The causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa'. Annan's objective was to direct the minds of Security Council members to problems on the continent. With the departure of both world leaders, the media packed its bag and left Africa to continue its search for peace. Africa's moment under the gaze of the world came to a quick end. In the summer of 1999, the spotlight was again thrown on the continent. Peace agreements were signed to end two of Africa's civil wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sierra Leone. No sooner had the warring parties signed, than the fragile peace (if it was even that) began to unravel. Again, the world gazed briefly on the continent's problems.

Solutions to Africa's conflicts had been given renewed attention at the start of the new century when the US Ambassador to the UN, Richard Holbrooke, and Kofi Annan, declared a month then a decade of Africa, respectively, in January 2000. African affairs had risen high up the agenda of the UN and other major powers, in particular Britain. There was cautious optimism about developments on the continent. However, by May 2000, the 'dark continent' had become in the words of *The Economist* (2000), 'the hopeless continent' when renewed fighting broke out in Sierra Leone, ten months after the signing of the Lomé peace agreement. In fact, the international community had become a victim in one of Africa's wars when rebel forces in Sierra Leone captured at least 500 UN peacekeepers. A breakdown in UN mediation over the Ethiopia-Eritrea war and the DRC in the same month added to the list of troubled mediations for outsiders. Diplomacy was on high alert as Britain and the UN led the way in finding solutions to crises on the continent. Despite the humiliation that confronted UN

# Africa's Global Impact<sup>1</sup>

**Comfort Ero**

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peacekeeping in Sierra Leone and the little headway observers made in the DRC, the UN Security Council went on to mandate peacekeepers to monitor the Ethiopian–Eritrean border in September 2000. After a decade in which the UN was unable to capture major power support to help resolve the continent's problems, African issues were forcing or challenging international diplomacy to respond to numerous crises. What became apparent halfway through 2000 was Africa's impact on global security concerns.

This article is concerned with Africa's growing impact, especially on international responses to issues of global security. Certain developments and processes on the continent have reverberated and influenced developments in other parts of the world. Take, for example, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the various attempts by international agencies to replicate this model in countries emerging from war or undergoing national reconciliation. Africa's global impact can best be illustrated in the area of conflict. The impact has been both positive and negative – negative in terms of the images generated through media commentaries, positive in terms of contributing significantly to forcing donor agencies to rethink various strategies to tackle conflicts. The results have not always been successful: for example, the problem of peacekeeping in the midst of a conflict, as reflected in the DRC and Sierra Leone. Nonetheless, the results draw attention to the need to revisit global projects aimed at preventing or mediating conflict.

Several major themes at the heart of contemporary global security concerns not only feature heavily in Africa but are having considerable impact on how the international community manages global security in the twenty-first century. These include war economies, dilemmas of peacekeeping, and poverty and (in)security. All are discussed below. These themes are not specific to African conflicts; they have reared their heads in spectacular fashion in today's other conflict-prone regions (e.g. Afghanistan, the Balkans, Chechnya, Columbia, Sri Lanka, and Cambodia), and in other periods. Yet, as a whole, several of the continent's conflicts appear to be a microcosm of many dilemmas confronting contemporary global security.

Growing global interconnectedness means that a focus on conflict necessitates examining its transnational, regional and international ramifications. But what does this mean in terms of international response to crises on the continent? The images of human suffering in several conflicts have been impossible to ignore, but as the article asks in conclusion, do the international ramifications of these conflicts imply more concrete policy agendas towards the continent? Will they produce positive outcomes in terms of donor initiatives?

## 1 War Economies

Of the major global security concerns, the issue of war economies has impacted considerably on contemporary understanding of conflicts. Following the televised images of children whose limbs have been torn off in Sierra Leone's conflict, the role of diamonds, especially those traded in the West, have placed a burden on the major powers to find solutions to 'conflict diamonds'. The economic motivations spurring on political violence have gradually become significant dimensions of international public policy discourse. Yet, war economies are not new phenomena of this contemporary world, nor are they specific to Africa. Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and the Balkans have their own stories to tell. The global impact of Sierra Leone (and Angola's) civil war have, however, been clear to see on two levels: first, in how global think-tanks and international agencies have responded to the problem of war economies; second, and as a consequence of a flurry of research and campaign, the role of some international companies, particularly those involved in diamond trading, is now a focus of heavy attention.

The drive by global think-tanks and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) since the mid-1990s to investigate what David Keen (1998) describes as the economic functions of violence in civil war has been significant in understanding the various agendas and sources of contemporary conflicts. Clearly, more effort, especially by practitioners in the field, needs to be directed at trying to trace the networks that sustain the 'war machinery' of several rebel and government forces. In this respect, the UN December 2000 Report of the Panel of Experts on the diamonds routes in Sierra Leone is a welcome step in understanding the

sources that continue to sustain rebels in the country's ten-year civil war. In Africa, the gradual focus on war economies has led to better understanding of the causes and persistence of conflicts beyond the conventional assumption that conflicts are associated with ancestral hatred or ethnicity. Analysis has also drawn attention to the global dimensions of war economies by uncovering the networks and alliances certain individuals or governments have with various international businessmen and companies. Again, the December report on Sierra Leone exposed the international middlemen that are part of the rebel supply chain. They include the Tajikistan-born Victor Bout, who is based in the United Arab Emirates, and the Lebanese businessman Talal El-Ndine (paras. 215 and 230 of the report).

Onlookers have been forced to address the key factors responsible for prolonging conflicts on the continent. War economies would almost certainly fall apart without the support of unscrupulous middlemen, who set up deals and fly diamonds to the main trading markets in the West. They would also collapse without commerce agreements that keep prices high. Angola's civil war is a case in point. The work by Global Witness, a London-based NGO, began to undercover corporate culpability among international companies such as the South Africa-British diamond group De Beers in sustaining the government and rebel war in the country. Another NGO, Partnership Africa-Canada, again targeted De Beers in a report, which argued that the company was part of the problem and solution to controlling the flow of diamonds from Sierra Leone (2000).

This concerted effort to probe into the role of international companies in some African conflicts has certainly caught the eye of several ministries in Western capitals; for example, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office. During his time as Minister for Africa, Peter Hain was at the forefront of introducing measures through the UN to tackle the role of diamonds in Angola and Sierra Leone. The sudden interest by governments can be interpreted as a drive to avert criticisms that Western governments might somehow be complicit in sustaining the war efforts of certain groups because they overlooked the role of Western companies like De Beers or Shell Oil in conflict-

prone regions of southeastern Nigeria. The UN, through its special sanctions committee on Angola, has been at the forefront of an uncompromising zeal to disclose the link between local war profiteers and the global economy. In a policy of 'naming and shaming' individuals or companies caught or suspected of trading in illicit goods, the UN has drawn attention to the transnational and international dimensions of African conflicts.

Antwerp, Belgium, the centre for the sale of diamonds, found itself labelled as a haven for diamond smugglers by the UN sanctions committee, which began to investigate the various international business links in Sierra Leone's civil war. Eight out of ten of the world's rough diamonds — about 125 million carats a year — pass through Antwerp's diamond centre. As a consequence of UN investigations, the Diamond High Council of Antwerp joined forces with other diamond mining houses to propose a system of certification of those diamonds legitimately extracted from Sierra Leone (Africa Confidential 2000, pp. 1–2). This focus on encouraging compliance, introducing a system of certification and strengthening controls to curb money laundering is a welcome effort to check and/or eliminate war economies. Out of Angola's and Sierra Leone's tragic civil war have been calls for more accountability and transparency in the licensing of awards to diggers and traders.

These ideas have already had wider impact. The embarrassment caused to companies like De Beers forced decisive action within international companies and trading centres. The company declared that it would not buy any diamonds originating in Angola, except from one government-controlled mine. Whether illegal extraction and trade can in fact be deterred is debatable. Whether we can make profiteers morally conscious of the detrimental effects of their activities is also open to debate. There are difficulties in regulating or imposing sanctions against highly fluid and informal processes. Nonetheless, the explicit focus taken by international agencies is an indication of the seriousness with which donors view the economic dimensions of civil wars.

Drawing attention to war economies is welcome, especially in responding to conflicts in Africa. What is worrying, however, is the analysis that conflicts

are singularly about and driven by greed defined purely in economic terms. The idea that greed rather than grievance is a key driver of conflict, especially in Africa, is associated with the World Bank project, the Economics of Civil War, Crime and Violence. Led by Paul Collier (director of the World Bank Development Research Group), the study summarised in an article entitled 'Doing Well Out of War' claims that many of the conflicts since 1965 are invariably caused by greed (i.e. wealth), and not grievance resulting from social or political exclusion and disenchantment with corrupt governments – in essence, bad governance (Collier 2000). The assumption that conflicts have nothing to do with grievance offers a misleading analysis or framework in which to understand conflicts, not just in Africa, but globally.

The World Bank-led project does not provide a substantial or complete analysis of why conflicts break out. Not all conflicts start out as being about diamonds, oil or gold. Analysis needs to target a wider picture that draws out deep structural factors such as socio-political systems that exacerbate or fuel conflicts. In Sierra Leone, while greed has played a significant role, one cannot understand the civil war without fully acknowledging the deep sense of frustration at poor government, political exclusion and crumbling infrastructures after years of corrupt mismanagement under one-party rule (Keen 2000: 35).

Another flaw within the greed/grievance framework is that it does not explain why certain countries that are rich in resources do not go to war. Take Botswana for example. Diamonds were first discovered in 1969. The country is now one of the largest diamond producers. It is also one of the most stable and prosperous countries in Africa. The diamond industry employs nearly a fourth of the country's 1.5 million people and accounts for two-thirds of government income. De Beers and the government control the industry in a 50–50 partnership. What is important to note is that the sources of grievance, which may trigger greed, for example, poor governance and economic mismanagement, are not so pronounced in Botswana as they are in other countries on the continent.

The insights gained by looking at the political economy of conflicts are useful in understanding

why conflicts persist in countries like Sierra Leone and Angola. Moreover, in terms of their impact on external mediation, war economies also demonstrate why peace agreements and peacekeeping missions fail when the economic motivations of conflicts far outweigh the desire for resolution. The incentive to continue war when it offers lucrative dividends is far more obvious than pursuing peace, a factor not adequately dealt with in the context of peacekeeping mandates.

## **2 Dilemmas of International Peacekeeping**

Peacekeeping remains the Achilles' heel of the international community. Over a decade since the Berlin Wall came down, the international community has been unable to cope with the outbreak of crises around the world. Whether inside or outside the African continent, international solutions have been unable to respond to the interplay of classic internal conflicts based on poverty, social crisis, weak institutions, ethnic division and the new 'post-industrial society' conflicts supposedly driven by consummate businessmen and entrepreneurs of war.

In contemporary Africa, the failure or inadequate response to meet the challenge of disorder has impacted in both a negative and positive way on how major powers of the UN Security Council handle complex and open-ended conflicts. The military disaster in Somalia remains the nadir of international peacekeeping, having profound impact on major power involvement in African conflicts. The response from Washington was 'never again', as reflected in the Clinton administration's Presidential Decision Directive No. 25. Similarly, following the early withdrawal of the peacekeepers from Somalia, the UN concluded 'that there were limits to the international community's ability or willingness to support, indefinitely and at great human and financial cost, a humanitarian mission under hostile conditions, and that new criteria would henceforth be applied in all questions relating to peacekeeping' (The United Nations and Somalia, 1996: 7, para. 15). The Commission set up to study the deaths of UN peacekeepers in Somalia concluded that the organisation should refrain from undertaking further peace enforcement actions within internal conflicts. Such a response

was to have considerable effect on the next UN mission in Africa, Rwanda.

A tirade of explosive reports commissioned in 1999 by the Secretary-General exposed the UN Security Council's limits in managing crises and its political unwillingness to do so. Kofi Annan's report into the role of the UN in Srebrenica was followed by another critical inquiry he commissioned on the genocide in Rwanda. The Rwanda report (1999) shook the UN; it was explicit in its criticisms against the system. The conclusions were clear: administrative shortcomings within the Secretariat, poor command and control and rules of engagement for peacekeeping operations, unavailability of resources and lack of political momentum of member states. These issues were again to confront the UN Security Council when, for the first time since Rwanda, it mandated peacekeepers back into Africa in October 1999.

Sierra Leone was supposed to have offered the UN an entry point back into Africa. Ever since the UN mission to Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was deployed in December 1999, the UN has encountered a series of humiliating experiences, which culminated in the capture of over 500 peacekeepers by the main rebel group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). As with other peace operations, UNAMSIL 'demonstrated the technical, conceptual and political flaws of responding to open-ended and intractable conflicts' (Ero 2000: 111). The inability to mandate effective peace operations on the African continent forced Western leaders to rethink their approaches to managing conflicts in two ways, but neither has produced the expected results. First is the Western agenda to push for more regional solutions, or, to use the popular euphemism, 'African solutions for African problems'. Nowhere else in the world do Western leaders propose such solutions. Moreover, the assortment of projects designed to reinforce regional peacekeeping capacities, such as the US's African Crisis Response Initiative and the French *Renforcement de capacités africaines maintien de la paix* (Reinforcement of African Peacekeeping Capacity) have neither won real support in Africa, nor been backed by significant external funds or expertise. In addition, the expectation that regional organisations could resolve their conflicts was spectacularly undermined in southern and central Africa. The

conflict in the DRC has continually divided member states of the Southern African Development Co-operation (SADC) since 1998; the institution has almost become sidelined as individual state interests override the notion of regional cooperation over security. In West Africa, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) continues to struggle against persistent instability, concerns over a powerful Nigeria and the destabilising effects of leaders such as President Charles Taylor of Liberia.

The second approach has been in the movement towards private security, especially where Western leaders are reluctant to mandate international peacekeeping or manage the task of supporting transitions from war to peace. In fact, one consequence of contemporary conflicts, not just in Africa, but in other regions, is that the international community has found it harder to control the numerous forces involved in protracted conflicts. Rather than develop an adequate conflict resolution regime, international security has gradually found itself being privatised. It was the revelation in 1998 that the British Government tacitly or knowingly supported Sandline International in its supply of arms to the forces supporting the Sierra Leone Government in contravention to a UN embargo, that sparked off a flurry of debates within the UN and Western capitals about the legitimate use of private military companies. Both Britain and the UN commissioned reports, but the international community has yet to answer the question of whether and when it is appropriate to mandate private security to pursue a combative role on behalf of the UN. Not surprisingly, the difficulties experienced by the UN in Sierra Leone in May 2000 renewed calls in some quarters about the usefulness of private military companies in managing conflicts.

Sierra Leone remains an important test case for future UN action in Africa. Also critical will be the UN peacekeeping mission deployed in December 2000 on the borders of Ethiopia and Eritrea and attempts to mobilise adequate forces for the DRC. Without being primarily about Africa, the 2000 UN review into the state of peace operations, the Brahimi Report, could have been written solely about the poor record of external involvement in managing African conflicts.<sup>2</sup> 'The need for change' in mandating and conducting peace operations was

qualified with reference to the crisis experienced by the UN in Sierra Leone and the DRC (Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations: 1, para. 4). The Brahimi Report points out ongoing lessons in the area of greater cohesion and direction, better rules of engagement, resources, command and control and equipment, all of which are reminiscent of previous inquiries and reviews. A significant idea, which will impact deeply in 'less politically attractive missions in Africa', is the recommendation that the Security Council leaves in draft form resolutions authorising peacekeeping missions until the Secretary-General has received firm commitments of number of troops and other necessary support from member states (Brahimi Report: 11, para. 6; Mackinlay 2000: 11). Brahimi is quite forthright in its criticisms and recommendations to the United Nations; however, it offers nothing radically new from similar exercises in the past. Yet, this should not be surprising. The experience of the UN in responding to conflicts characterised by numerous factions, longevity and complex internal dynamics imply that something stronger than peacekeeping is needed if the international community is serious about peace, security and conflict prevention, the latter a major theme set to dominate the agenda of the UN and donor agencies in the coming years.

### **3 Poverty, Security and Development**

The continuation of conflict in several developing countries has had significant impact on various international governance projects. In the last decade, aid agencies have had to confront the effects of persistent conflict in their ability to deliver assistance. Not only have contemporary conflicts exposed the limits of external reform packages, they have also had a profound impact on how aid agencies think about conflict and mobilise assistance around preventing or resolving conflict. In a number of countries across Africa, but also in southeast Europe and the former Soviet Union, armed conflict and prolonged humanitarian crises have posed new and difficult challenges for aid agencies. Aid agencies have found that many of their assistance packages are either overrun by events or inadequate in tackling conflicts. In the search to resolve and prevent conflict, aid agencies began to assert the importance of poverty and

insecurity as causes of conflict in developing countries, but also that conflict itself breeds poverty (World Bank 1997). According to the major donor agencies, without security, sustainable development and poverty alleviation cannot be achieved. Thus began the link between poverty, security and development.

Since the end of the Cold War, the link between security and development has been examined in the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The idea of linking security with development is seen as going hand-in-hand with the new 'poverty focus' of the World Bank and the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The recognition that security is an essential condition for sustained development and poverty alleviation is prominent in both the 1997 and 2000 British Government White Paper on International Development, 'Eliminating world poverty: a challenge for the 21st century and eliminating world poverty – making globalisation work for the poor'. Security is defined to mean economic, personal and political security. The World Bank's flagship publication, *World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty* also incorporates this link when it defines poverty as 'multidimensional' (p. 19). Tackling poverty requires not only an economic focus, but also a more comprehensive approach that embraces peoples 'vulnerabilities' (security), 'voicelessness' and 'powerlessness' (World Bank 2000: 19).

DFID has been at the forefront of work that places poverty, security and development at the heart of conflict. In a new policy statement launched in March 1999, Clare Short, the Secretary of State for Development, outlined DFID's objectives on tackling poverty under the banner of 'Poverty and the Security Sector'. The security sector is defined to mean the police, military, paramilitary and intelligence and those responsible for oversight and control of security forces. The new thinking is premised on the assumption that uncontrollable security expenditure and ill-disciplined security forces are detrimental to sustainable development and poverty alleviation. As DFID's policy statement on the security sector outlines, 'an unreformed security sector often fails to prevent and sometimes causes violent conflict which leads to increased

suffering and poverty' (DFID 1999: 2). Since launching the initiative in 1999, DFID's objectives have been twofold: on the one hand, to assist developing countries with repressive security forces by turning the latter into effective and accountable agencies capable of protecting the state and its citizens. On the other hand, the initiative has focused on how to establish effective civil oversight of security forces. The aim is to bring the good-governance agenda to bear down on the security sector.

The focus of much of this thinking on the security sector is predominantly in Africa, with in-roads being made in Asia. Sierra Leone is the first test case for this new merging of poverty, development and security. Since 1998, Britain has supported the Government of Sierra Leone in a programme that aims at restructuring the Ministry of Defence, reforming the police, strengthening mechanisms for civil oversight, including parliament's capacity to scrutinise the security sector, and supporting the establishment of a new national security policy. Despite a temporary halt in the programme when fighting broke out in May 2000, the security sector programme is set to take place over five years.

One cannot deny the need to develop effective oversight mechanisms, as well as viable institutions able to assure security for the state and its people in many African societies. At the centre of many crises affecting African societies are security forces which are 'agents of insecurity' (Adejumobi 2000). Appropriately, the work of pro-democracy activists and African scholars has gradually influenced much of the thinking being generated by external agents like DFID. For example, of the five key authors to the DFID background papers for its symposium on security-sector reform and military expenditure in February 2000, two were prominent Africa-based security specialists. In addition, three Africa-based institutes, the African Security Dialogue and Research (Ghana), the Centre for Democracy and Development (Nigeria) and the Institute for Security Studies (South Africa) have been critical in shaping this new agenda.

There are, however, a number of problems surrounding this growing international interest on security-sector reform. First, there is as yet no clear

consensus or policy coherence on the approach within the donor community or between the key agents who will assist in this area, namely traditional players such as ministries of defence and newly emerging actors from the development world. In addition, those countries at the receiving end of much of this assistance remain hesitant about donor motives, consistency in approaches and policy assumptions underpinning security-sector initiatives.

Second, and more significant, is understanding the nature of the security sector itself, especially in Africa. There is no substantive or adequate knowledge of the African security systems, especially those that are emerging in contemporary Africa. Directly related is the problem of deconstructing the complex networks and configurations that underpin the security sector and its relation with other key institutions of state and, more critically, links with a growing plethora of militia or armed groups within society. In addition, this new agenda assumes that security forces, or the military (to be precise), are the main problem. The history of mismanagement and misuse of security forces by political leaders, particularly in Africa, is evident. This is not to suggest that security forces are not notorious for subverting or manipulating political space through corruption, greed, violence and partiality, as, for example, in 1992-96, when Sierra Leone's armed forces were the prime catalyst for ensuing political crisis in the country. Security forces often collude with civilian regimes; in the end, both are seen by most of the population as contributing to the overall security problem. What it means, therefore, is that rebuilding security forces in post-war climates cannot be considered in isolation from a comprehensive programme of transforming, or in some instances reconfiguring, the political and socio-economic foundations governing that given society. Security forces do not operate in a vacuum; they are not a separate entity, but are part of the underlying social fabric in any given society.

Third is the general problem of understanding many of the problems related to conflict, security and development issues in Africa. Security sector reform could become another form of 'tinkering at the edges' by external powers, who have little real depth of understanding of the countries and

dynamics they are dealing with. Donors often assume that security crises actually block development, rather than seeing them as a product of past failed development programmes (many of which they advocated) or of the broader current effects of globalisation. The danger is that while development agencies attempt to grapple with the complexities of security dynamics, the broader development context may be lost.<sup>3</sup>

#### **4 The Future of Policy Coherence in Africa**

African conflicts have been crucial in shaping global concerns and, to an extent, forcing a rethink in external management of conflicts, though, even with the presence of Kofi Annan as head of the UN, the power of Africans at the level of decision-making is often slight. However, alongside the considerable attention given to conflicts in the Balkans and East Timor, far too few resource (political and financial) are directed towards Africa. The immediate benefits of direct involvement in conflicts in the continent are not too obvious for the major powers, in particular the USA. As John Stremlau notes, 'war in Africa seems to pose no clear and present danger to US interests' (Stremlau 2000: 117). Despite the amount of (well-meaning) attention given by President Bill Clinton, who paid more attention to Africa than his predecessors, no concrete policy initiative has emerged from Washington.

The story has been slightly different in Britain. Analysts of African affairs or British foreign policy will note how high Africa has risen up the policy agenda in Whitehall. Between them, Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, Peter Hain, the Minister of State for Africa, and Clare Short, Secretary of State for International Development, have focused heavily on how the developed world ought to help Africa. Of all three, Peter Hain was the most vocal in addressing Africa's conflicts. From Angola to the DRC and Sierra Leone, Hain has managed to raise the profile of several problems on the continent. In fact, Hain's constant focus, especially on the role of diamonds came as a major surprise, leading analysts to wonder if this represented serious commitment by Britain towards the continent (Ero 2000: 116).

In September 2000, the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, added to this growing sense of

commitment when he emphasised the UN's responsibility in tackling conflicts in Africa. In his speech at the UN Millennium Summit, Blair stated, 'there is a dismal record of failure in Africa on the part of the developed world that shocks and shames our civilisation.' He then went on to say: 'We should use this unique summit for a concrete purpose: to start the process of agreeing a way forward for Africa. What can we do for Africa? We need a new partnership for Africa in which Africa leads but the rest of the world is committed' (Blair 2000). This speech, along with the prominence of Britain's presence in Sierra Leone, certainly reinforces the country's commitment towards Africa, but what does this mean in terms of long-term coherent and concrete practical policies?

There are already signs that Whitehall may be thinking seriously about how to take forward the themes raised by Blair. During 2001, Africa will be a major driving force behind several global themes that Britain will promote under an 'African Partnership Initiative'. Under the initiative, key global security issues will include thinking about the cause and prevention of conflict, improving the management of conflict, including implementation of the Brahimi report, peace-building and tackling the proliferation of small arms. A major theme linking all these issues together will be 'African solutions for African problems'. Aspects of this British initiative are reminiscent of similar initiatives promoted in the mid-1990s in response to conflicts on the continent. But how different are these issues, and have any lessons been learnt to explain why many initiatives failed to take root in the 1990s?

In the last decade, the major Western powers have demonstrated an extraordinary multiplicity of discourses and contradictory actions. The latest discourse stems from the UN Millennium Summit for Heads of States. The inconsistency and ambiguity of international actions highlights the fact that outsiders are extremely uncertain as to whether they have a moral or ethical contribution to make to peace in Africa. It is around this issue that analysis is required of external policies towards conflict in the continent. The content of external policies, plus their overall coherence, requires examination over the medium term. There needs to be a critical diagnosis of external projects in the 1990s aimed at helping Africa to help itself and more generally assisting Africa in



moments of crisis. An immediate lesson over the last decade is that 'quick-fix solutions' are bound to fail. Moreover, there needs to be far greater degree of honesty about what outsiders are willing and able to deliver. *Ad hoc* policies and tinkering from the periphery will not work. Medium- to long-term engagement is necessary if external initiatives for Africa are to be taken seriously.

As the weakest link in the global chain, Africa often receives special mention when international crises are tackled. The September 2000 UN Millennium Summit is a case in point. The continent shared centre-stage with the Middle East. However, Western policy is still firmly premised on 'African solutions for African problems'. Africa's security problems may be critical in transforming the thinking of global security matters; however, the talk of partnership, as expressed by Blair and other Western leaders, serves to distort the reality of the message. Africa's security in the twenty-first century, or at least for the foreseeable future, will be determined largely by Africa's leaders.

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- The intervention by British troops in Sierra Leone in May 2000 was a rare event for contemporary Africa. Western governments still remain reluctant to place their troops on the ground. Yet, this should not be seen in a negative sense. African leaders themselves need to demonstrate their commitment to finding peaceful solutions to conflicts on the continent. The history of externally driven solutions and poorly resourced peacekeeping initiatives has often hurt rather than helped African conflicts.

## Notes

1. I would like to thank participants at the MA seminar class at the Peace Studies Department, University of Bradford, for their comments following a presentation of an earlier version of this article.
2. The 'Brahimi Report' has become a shorthand title for the UN review of peacekeeping operations, published in August 2000 by a panel chaired by the former Algerian Foreign Minister and UN Undersecretary-General, Lakhdar Brahimi.
3. I thank Susan Willett for raising some of these points with me.

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