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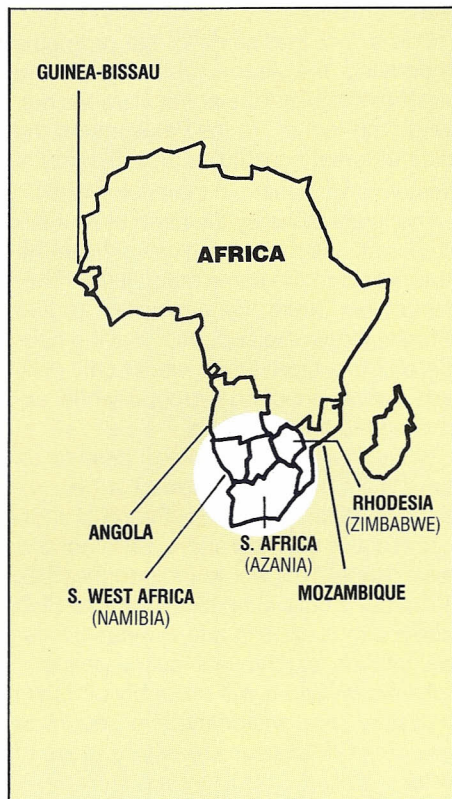
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# The Quiet Role Of OAU in Africa's Liberation

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By Mohamed A. El-Khawas

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) was created in 1963 at a time when the philosophy of non-violence was bankrupt in Southern Africa. Following decades of non-violent protest efforts, tactics shifted toward revolutionary models, largely in response to the determined refusal of the remaining colonial and settler regimes to relinquish their control over Southern Africa—including Angola, Guinea (Bissau), Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) and South Africa (Azania).

Several incidents of repressive actions by the colonial and settler governments served as turning points for tactical thinking; in particular the banning of political parties and the detaining of nationalist leaders not only forced some African leaders to flee their countries but also prodded them toward revolutionary militancy. Subsequently, in exile they be-

came the primary forces behind the formation of national liberation movements. (See list on page 18.)

An early sign of the shift in the African view point came in 1961 when the Manifesto of the African National Congress (ANC) stated: "The time comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices—submit or fight. That time has now come . . . We shall not submit, and we have no choice but to hit back by all means in our power in defence of our people, our future and our freedom."<sup>1</sup>

The same year, the All-African Peoples Conference in Cairo endorsed "the necessity . . . to resort to force in order to liquidate colonialism."<sup>2</sup> A year later, the Pan-African Freedom Movement of East and Central Africa (PAFMECSA), which had previously championed non-violence,<sup>3</sup> endorsed the ANC call to arms and expanded its membership to include the Southern African liberation movements (PAFMECSA).

It was in this atmosphere that the OAU was formed in order to transform national liberation struggle from regional to continental wide efforts. The result was the dissolution of PAFMECSA and the transfer of its functions and funds to the OAU, which proceeded immediately to set up a mechanism by which African and non-African states could provide the various liberation movements with military training, equipment and financing to wage armed struggle against colonial and settler regimes.

## Diplomatic Efforts

The immediate results of the creation of the OAU were: to give legitimacy to the liberation struggle against racism and colonialism in Africa; to provide independent African states with a machinery to supply the liberation movements with material and other assistance needed to wage their armed struggles; to set in motion a unified African policy toward colonial and settler regimes in Africa; and to solicit international support for the liberation efforts in Southern Africa.

As early as 1963, the OAU member states agreed on the following: to sever diplomatic and consular relations with Portugal and South Africa; to impose economic boycott against them; and to send a delegation to the United Nations Security Council in New York to speak on behalf of all African states.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, they promised to coordinate and intensify their efforts to put an end to colonialism and racism. Such a unified policy was a giant step in the direction of carrying out their diplomatic offenses in the halls of the U.N. and international conferences.

The new organization gave an impetus to move away from moderation and accommodation to confrontation and militancy. It instructed African representatives in New York to press for the U.N. adoption of the severest possible measures against Portugal, South Africa—and later Rhodesia—as a demonstration of their solidarity and singleness of purpose. They openly expressed dissatisfaction with the way the U.N. has handled colonialism and apartheid, since the policy of persuasion merely encouraged the Lisbon and Pretoria governments to intensify their repressive policies in Africa.<sup>5</sup> The OAU insisted that the time for appeasement was over and that the U.N. must take forcible measures to induce changes.

From 1964 on, the OAU began to focus its attention on Portugal's NATO allies and South Africa's major trading partners—the Western European countries, the U.S. and Japan—who represented major obstacles to the liberation struggle. In 1965 and 1967, the African representatives had so effectively argued this viewpoint about the detrimental impact of the countries continuing economic, diplomatic and military relations with Lisbon and Pretoria that this view was endorsed by the U.N. General Assembly.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, the OAU leaders went to Europe, the U.S. and Japan to exert pressure on those countries aiding South Africa, Portugal and Rhodesia for several reasons: they had substantially increased the volume of trade and investment in



South Africa; West Germany, the Netherlands and later the U.S. had resumed trade with Rhodesia in violation of the U.N. sanctions;<sup>7</sup> and Portugal had continued to use NATO weapons in Africa in violation of the treaty obligations. For instance, M. Ould Daddah, then chairman of the OAU, visited 12 European capitals and Tokyo in 1972 to appeal to South Africa's trading partners to impose economic boycott and to urge NATO member countries to prevent Portugal from using NATO weapons in its African wars. He also solicited their support for the liberation struggles in Southern Africa. But the appeals were ignored as most nations—including Britain, U.S.A., Canada, France and West Germany—continued to invest in South Africa, trade with Rhodesia and ignore Portugal's usage of NATO weapons in Africa. Only Turkey and Scandinavian countries agreed to assist the liberation movements through the OAU.<sup>8</sup> In sum, these missions abroad produced very limited results.

In the following years, the OAU efforts were directed more towards those countries directly or indirectly aiding colonial and settler regimes in Southern Africa—countries whose policies had placed the colonial and settler regimes in a much better position to withstand the economic and diplomatic sanctions that had been imposed by African and most Third World nations.

It should be noted that the OAU was limited to press for what amounted to a public censure of several important world powers for their failure to impose diplomatic and economic boycotts against South Africa, Portugal and Rhodesia. The organization reached such a position, however, only as an end result of several years of effort ranging from temperate and relatively mild strategies to ever more firm and insistent measures as colonial and settler regimes had increasingly reinforced their repressive policies.

Condemnation of big powers definitely represented a strong position, and the

strength and the determination of the OAU is demonstrated well by its ability to receive the U.N. General Assembly's endorsement for the African stance. It was due to such persistent efforts that the General Assembly declared in 1965 that colonialism and apartheid were both a threat to peace and crime against humanity. It also invited all states, in cooperation with the OAU, to provide material and moral assistance to liberation movements and requested the U.N. specialized agencies to increase their assistance to African refugees.<sup>9</sup>

#### Sources of Aid

The bulk of assistance to the liberation movements has come from independent African states, in the form of money, arms and training facilities. This support, a natural psychological reaction to long years of colonial bondage, is the cornerstone of the liberation struggles in Southern Africa. Leaders of independent African states—radical, moderate and conservative alike—have felt that their own national independence is not complete “unless all Africans are free . . . We must align and identify ourselves with all aspects of their struggle.”<sup>10</sup>

It was in this atmosphere of determination that, in 1963, the newly created Organization of African Unity called for “eliminating colonialism altogether”<sup>11</sup> and committed its member states to the “urgent necessity of coordinating and intensifying their efforts to accelerate the unconditional attainment of national independence by all African territories still under foreign domination.”<sup>12</sup>

The organization took measures to ensure the efficiency of its campaign against colonialism and for liberation. For example, it established a Liberation Committee to accomplish the following: to coordinate material and financial support sent to the liberation movements from individual African states and from abroad; to render recognition and financial assistance to selected revolutionary movements; to reconcile differences among

rival insurgent organizations in an attempt to form united fronts; to facilitate the formation of revolutionary alliances across national boundaries; and to use diplomacy to publicize their struggle in international organizations and conferences.<sup>13</sup>

Among the African governments that positively responded to the OAU's call to create a Liberation Fund were Algeria, Guinea and Tanzania. A total of \$336,000 was made available immediately. In addition, Cameroon, Nigeria and Uganda promised another \$436,000.<sup>14</sup> Within a year, the majority of African states had completed their pledges and only two countries had fallen behind in their payments.<sup>15</sup> The second year, however, several governments (24 out of 30) became delinquent in their payments.<sup>16</sup>

Such uneven financing of the Liberation Fund did significantly limit the Fund's effectiveness in helping the liberation movements. Because the majority of independent African states insisted that payments to the fund be made voluntarily, the fund depended on the willingness each year of those governments to make contributions. There was a short-lived attempt in 1964 to specify an obligatory minimum sum to be paid annually by each independent African state, until a scale of assessment could be worked out, but this proposal was rejected and the OAU continued to avoid coercive measures against delinquent member states. Two years later, the OAU conducted an open discussion of the liberation budget, but rejected a motion by Tanzania to set up a fixed budget for the Liberation Committee as a means of stabilizing the funding of the liberation struggles. Meanwhile, the majority of independent states still refused to commit themselves to regular annual payments to the Liberation Fund.<sup>17</sup>

The OAU's persistent financial difficulties had considerably weakened its ability to influence the directions of the liberation struggles. Liberation movements, which had received little or no financial assistance from the Liberation Committee,



18 continued to express dissatisfaction with the OAU aid program. And several nationalist leaders went West and East in their search for external assistance, particularly for arms and personnel to teach guerrilla warfare tactics. Basil Davidson reported in 1971 that "all movements have tried repeatedly to secure aid from Western sources and all stress their non-aligned posture. So far—aside from aid in medical and other stores collected by unofficial groups in half a dozen Western countries, and now from the Council of Churches—they have found a response only in Sweden."<sup>18</sup>

Under these circumstances, revolutionary leaders had no option but to seek assistance from the Eastern bloc. Because of Cold War competition, the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and Eastern Europe extended material and other forms of assistance to revolutionary groups in Africa. But when the Sino-Soviet split took place, Peking became less interested in courting revolutionary groups in Africa and insisted that liberation movements must choose between Moscow and Peking.<sup>19</sup>

### Dialogue With South Africa

Time had shown that the OAU certainly over-estimated its ability to finance the armed struggles in Southern Africa. Its liberation efforts were hampered on the one hand by rivalry among revolutionary leadership, internal strife and violent inter-party clashes, and on the other hand, by the failure of some African states to make regular annual contributions to the Liberation Fund. By the end of the 1960s, the OAU was forced to re-assess its strategy toward the liberation of Southern Africa in the face of substantial increases in military budgets and in close military cooperation among South Africa, Portugal and Rhodesia.

In response, the OAU Summit in Addis Ababa in September 1969 endorsed the Lusaka Manifesto which stated that:

*On the objective of liberation . . . We have always preferred and we still prefer, to achieve it without physical vio-*

*lence. We would prefer to negotiate rather than destroy. . . . If peaceful progress to emancipation were possible, or if changed circumstances were to make it possible in the future, we would urge our brothers in the resistance movements to use peaceful methods of struggle even at the cost of some compromise on the timing of change.<sup>20</sup>*

This endorsement meant that the OAU had committed itself to encourage the liberation movements to cooperate in the mechanics of a peaceful transfer of power if the minority regimes would accept the principle of self-determination. This new attitude led President Houphouet-Boigny of the Ivory Coast in 1970 to talk of dialogue with South Africa. He was supported by Malagasy, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, Gabon, Chad and Dahomey for the following reasons:

- The armed struggle has failed . . .
- The African states do not possess the military and economic resources to challenge South Africa decisively.
- Meanwhile, South Africa feeling itself threatened may be incited into taking the offensive.
- The policy of political and cultural isolation will not eliminate apartheid. Instead, "isolation only seems to consolidate national unity and increase national resolve to maintain and defend the regime."
- The trade embargo cannot succeed. Many countries, including some African countries, have stated that they must continue to trade with South Africa.
- There are moderate forces within South Africa, Black and white, with whom contact should be made . . .
- The fact that African states are holding a dialogue with the South African Government will encourage moderate white opinion and influential business pressure groups to seek an accord with the Black majority for the purpose of changing the apartheid policies.<sup>21</sup>

These arguments were rejected by the majority of the OAU member states who insisted that no dialogue could take

## Southern Africa Liberation Movements

### ANGOLA:

Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola (MPLA)  
 Governo Revolucionario de Angola no Exilio/Frente Nacional de Libertacao de Angola (GRAE/FNLA)  
 Uniao Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola (UNITA)

### GUINEA (BISSAU):

Partido Africano da Independencia da Guine e Cabo Verde (PAIGC)  
 Frente para a Libertacao e Independencia da Guine Portuguesa (FLING)

### MOZAMBIQUE:

Frente de Libertacao de Mocambique (FRELIMO)  
 Comite Revolucionario de Mocambique (COREMO)

### ZIMBABWE (RHODESIA):

Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU)  
 Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU)  
 Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe (FROLIZI)  
 Zimbabwe People's Army (ZIPA)  
 Patriotic Front (ZANU & ZAPU)  
 United African National Congress (UANAC)

### AZANIA (SOUTH AFRICA):

African National Congress (ANC)  
 Pan Africanist Congress (PAC)  
 Unity Movement

### NAMIBIA (SOUTH WEST AFRICA):

South West Africa National Union (SWANU)  
 South West African People's Organization (SWAPO)

place before South Africa's acceptance to abandon the principles of apartheid. They felt that Pretoria was motivated to make such propositions because:

- She wishes to neutralize the liberation movements.
- She is trying to break out of the increasing isolation from which she is beginning to suffer.
- She seeks to gain respectability in the eyes of the world.
- Her government must continue to reassure the white supporters in the country that it can guarantee them protection.
- Her government must continue to reassure foreign investors that their assets are safe and will remain safe.
- South Africa is seeking to diffuse the hostility against her so that she can build a market in Africa to meet the needs of an economy which is beginning to feel the strain of crampness.<sup>22</sup>

Although the opponents to dialogue were able to receive the endorsement of the OAU, the controversy had split African



solidarity against colonialism and racial discrimination in Southern Africa. For example, Ghana, Ethiopia, Mali, Equatorial Guinea and Liberia thought that "dialogue and armed pressures are not necessarily incompatible."<sup>23</sup>

### The Impact of OAU's Role

The OAU has attempted to play a significant role in the liberation struggles in Southern Africa because wars of liberation could not be successfully launched without external assistance. Aside from giving legitimacy to the armed struggle, the OAU has conducted diplomatic campaigns to isolate South Africa, Portugal and Rhodesia. Although its efforts have not always met with success, it has kept these issues alive and has largely influenced decisions of international bodies. It did not shy from criticizing some big power nations for failure to give support to the African political and economic strategy against colonial and settler regimes in Southern Africa. In addition, it expressed concern over the decisions by Western Europe, the U.S.A. and Japan to continue trade and investment in South Africa.

The OAU kept a sharp eye on international events in searching for opportunities that might advance its cause. The Organization took advantage of the 1973 Middle East war and called upon the Arab oil-producing nations "to extend the oil embargo to South Africa, Portugal and Rhodesia" until they capitulate. In response, the Arab governments endorsed the OAU call and imposed oil embargo against the white minority regimes in Southern Africa; they also promised to provide political and material assistance to the liberation movements.<sup>24</sup>

The creation of the OAU Liberation Committee has provided valuable assistance to the liberation struggles in Southern Africa. The committee has put pressure on independent African states to contribute regularly to the eradication of colonialism and racism from that region, and has provided a convenient mechanism for channeling aid from abroad to the liberation

movements. Although the OAU has been widely criticized for its limited financial support, it has steadily managed to sustain the struggle in various countries in the area for several years. Because of financial constraint and the failure of some African governments to make regular contributions to the Liberation Fund, the OAU has been unable to allocate adequate funding for the liberation struggles in Southern Africa. It has been compelled to withhold recognition from some movements and to increase financial allocations to others, particularly to those groups which have demonstrated military successes against their enemies. In the late 1960s, the OAU considerably increased budgetary allocations to both the PAIGC and the FRELIMO when their military campaigns were intensified against Portugal inside Guinea (Bissau) and Mozambique, respectively. Such a policy was practical since the eviction of Portuguese colonialism from Southern Africa has already been completed. With the liberation of these former Portuguese territories, now the OAU might be in a better position to allocate more funds and to devote more time to the liberation of Namibia, Rhodesia and South Africa.

The OAU has worked hard since 1963 to persuade rival groups from the same country to resolve their differences and to coordinate their military and political activities against their common enemy. Although it has not always been able to achieve its objectives, it has managed to bring about short-lived agreements among revolutionary leaders.

If the results obtained by the OAU have been modest, this is because several independent African states have negatively responded to the liberation call. A number of states have been in arrears and have ignored repeated appeals by the OAU to bring their payments up to date. Therefore, the OAU cannot be blamed for its failure to provide substantial assistance to the liberation struggles in Southern Africa since it is merely a reflection of the interest and support of its member states. □

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