1-1-1979

The Crumbling Pax-Africana: A Political Analysis

Gilbert Keith Bluwey

Follow this and additional works at: https://dh.howard.edu/newdirections

The Crumbling Pax-Africana

A Political Analysis

ILLUSTRATION BY BRUCE FAGIN

By Gilbert Keith Bluwey

The abundance of rich natural and human resources aside, Africa today remains the sleeping giant of our time. Witness the continuing wave of big-power confrontation in several parts of the continent—a confrontation that carries ominous implications for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and economic well-being of the continent as a whole. This exposes the duplicity and tortuousness of the moral pretentions of big-powers toward Africa. It also vindicates the fears expressed by the early nationalists against the spectre of neocolonialism in its very embryonic stages.

The combined effects of widespread poverty in weak and dependent economies, and the complex web of internal contradictions in the African setting, has generated situations very receptive to the bait of big-power pretentions. From the Horn down to the Cape, and throughout the Soudan and the Zambezi regions, the post-independence condition of Africa reacts with the precision of a robot to the whims of big-power manipulations.

The story of the second scramble for Africa is well-known. The granting of political independence to individual African states did not bring a cessation of the centuries-old master-servant relationship with the retiring colonizers. Indeed, the event served not only to exhibit the vast economic potential and strategic impor-

tance of Africa in the international chess-game, but also to expose the helplessness of the African states against foreign designs on their sovereignty. Moscow and Peking, along with their satellites from the East, made an early debut in the fray while Washington and the West set out to fortify and expand their already secure frontiers.

The more perceptive ones among the African nationalists clearly understood the policy implications of the new phase of big-power pretentions toward Africa and denounced it as neocolonialism. In the words of Ghana's pioneer nationalist Kwame Kkrumah, ". . . Once a territory has become nominally independent, it is no longer possible, as it was in the last century, to reverse the process. Existing colonies may linger on but no new colonies will be created. In place of colonialism as the main instrument of imperialism, we have today neo-colonialism. The essence of neocolonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality, its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside."

Neo-colonialism under this persuasion presents a threat to the sovereignty of the state, because it denies the people of the new state the freedom to evolve their own autonomous political and economic systems.

Progressive African nationalists, in reaction to the deliberately precipitant withdrawal of French bureaucracy from Guinea in 1958, and the foreign-induced imbroglio in the Congo (June 1960), stepped up the call for practical steps to wrest Africa free of neocolonialist designs. The seven Casablanca bloc of states—Ghana, the United Arab Republic, Guinea, Mali, Libya, Morocco and Algeria—specifically called for an immediate political union of all Africa committed to socialist reconstruction along with an African High Command for the defense of the territorial integrity of the continental union government.

For various widely known and hotly debated reasons, a larger grouping of 29 African states, dominated by Nigeria and Liberia, rejected the union idea as well as the creation of an African High Command and the introduction of a program for the socialist reconstruction of African society and economy. Instead, they called for a gradual and functional approach toward "the ultimate goal of political unification."

Bitter inter-personal acrimony and ideological rift followed, keeping Africa divided for three long years during which time the super powers fortified their holdings on the continent. The compromise charter of unity and cooperation which emerged at the first fully representative conference of the newly formed Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Addis Ababa

on May 23, 1963, proved a patch-work of contradictions. The OAU, which in intent and purpose represents the collective will and power of Africa against the forces of neocolonialism has been endowed with a structure too weak to meet its basic commitment. Its governing principles are also fraught with contradictions which now haunt the best intentions of its founders.

The more serious structural defects in the OAU were the absence of an executive sovereign to control and direct developments on the continent, and the failure to create an African High Command to guard against pre-emptive assaults on member nations. Openly suspicious of the progressive platform for an immediate surrender of territorial sovereignty to a continental government, Africa's leaders in 1963 created the OAU, a loose association of equal states with no determinate central direction. An annual conference of heads of state was chartered to review events on the continent for the preceeding year and to agree on areas of cooperation in the ensuing year. Foreign ministers of member states constituted a Council of Ministers, which would meet quarterly to review developments on the continent. A Committee on Arbitration and Conciliation was also formed to attempt peaceful resolution of conflict situations among member states. By deliberately creating an obvious vacancy at the command-post,

the OAU sought a peace structure based upon the pure good faith of its members. That obvious omission, in time, became an intolerable burden on the self-restraint of member states with revolutionary inclinations who set out under various guises to subvert a peace structure which they helped fashion.

> *"The seeds of the present day concept of national self-determination were sowed in the turbulence and resistance that followed the 18th century partitions of Poland, the American and French revolutions of the 18th century and the declaration of the war aims of the Allied powers in World War I."*

An important pretext for subverting the OAU's pax Africana was provided by the organization's charter. Overwhelmed by a common desire to work for the speedy dismantling of the remaining enclaves of colonialism, the charter averred to the principles of national self-determination. The obvious intent of that declaration was to provide an authentic moral basis upon which to rally world-wide support for the

intended total assault on the policies of assimilation and apartheid which still held sway in Portuguese and South African colonial thinking. In other words, self-determination within the context of the OAU would be acceptable only for territories as a whole and not for ethnic groupings. Such an interpretation would be in consonance with the OAU's act (noted earlier) of legitimizing the arbitrary and unnatural territorial boundaries bequeathed to each of its members by the respective retiring colonial power.

Indeed, self-determination has never been accorded universal application in any historical context. The seeds of the present-day concept of national self-determination were sowed in the turbulence and resistance that followed the 18th century partitions of Poland, the American and French revolutions of the 18th century and the declaration of the war aims of the Allied powers in World War I. Alfred Cobban, in a highly instructive discussion of the subject, observed that although the Allied Powers, as represented by President Woodrow Wilson of the United States, gave the broadest and the most liberal exposition to the concept, they meant it to have only a limited application.

Cobban's view was that the Wilsonian concept of national self-determination referred exclusively to those areas of Europe and Asia which were under the sovereign jurisdiction of the defeated powers of

World War I. The concept was given further force and form by the third article of the Atlantic charter (1941) and thereafter became the ideological weapon which liberation movements throughout the world wielded to wrest themselves free of foreign political domination. In recent times, a Secretary General of the United Nations Organization (U Thant) asserted:

"... as far as the question of secession of a particular section of a member state is concerned, the United Nation's attitude is unequivocal. As an international organization, the U.N.O. has never accepted and does not accept, and I do not believe it will ever accept the principle of secession of a part of its member-state."

In addition, the 15th Session of the U.N. General Assembly (1963) adopted the following resolution,

"Any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations Organization."

Pious declarations, however, are never enough to restrain the ambitions of revolutionary leaders. Thus, in the absence of potential deterrence, member states of the OAU, as indeed every other ambitious state in the international system, nurse territorial ambitions and often attempt their implementation.

It must be remembered also that the prospect of reuniting kingdoms and ethnic groups arbitrarily held apart by colonial rule provided much of the spark to nationalism. To confound such a cherished expectation, even when the guards have been changed, means to perpetuate a fundamental mistake of colonialism. Resistance is unlikely to abate merely because the internal colonizer has a skin color identical to those of the colonized. It appears that the good faith of the founding fathers in the self-restraint of generations of African leaders has been misplaced.

The progressive forces lost also on their demand for an African High Com-

mand to guard against territorial encroachments. Again, events subsequent to the rejection of the proposal for High Command clearly vindicate the progressive forces and negate the fears expressed by the reactionaries.

The place of military might in the power relations among states cannot be overemphasized. As a rule, the level of a state's military preparedness is a measure of its actual power. Credible deterrance, therefore, requires manifest fighting power. There is little doubt that the white minority and Ian Smith of Rhodesia would have capitulated to an African High Command. The recent series of military promanades deep into Angolan and Mozambiquean territories by South African troops, and into Zambia by Rhodesian forces, would not have been contemplated in the face of an African High Command. The embarrassing situation to Africa created by the perpetual inability of the fighting forces of Zaire to expel marauding bands of mercenary fighters from the strategic province of Shaba would have been offset by an African High Command. Also the existence of an African High Command would have helped ease tension among nations with traditional boundary disputes. In short, an African High Command would have offered the deterrance necessary to keep foreign forces out of the continent and also restrain the ambitions of restive leaders on the continent.

While the rejection of the idea of an African High Command did not mean that the statesmen were unaware of potential threats to the sovereignty of individual African states, they nevertheless saw those threats emanating from their neighbors. Thus, the conservative African leaders opted for various types of *defence de entete* with foreign powers — usually with the retiring colonial power. That option, unwittingly legitimatized continued foreign military presence and virtually reserved to France and Britain the right to intervene with troops to maintain the status quo.

The foregoing backdrop should offer a

basis for analyzing recent waves of overt military intervention in Africa. In broad terms, two types of conflict situations plague the continent today. There are Conflict situations centering around border disputes, and the principle of self-determination between groups of independent African states. These are represented by the conflict in the Horn of Africa, the dispute over the Spanish Sahara and the series of border squabbles and skirmishes in West and Central Africa. In none of these situations has either the OAU or any of the parties in conflict been able to pursue stated goals without the benefit of foreign assistance. The OAU never articulated a definitive position in these conflict situations. Diplomatic support and alliance tend to change overnight and without regard to principles. Foreign powers, on the other hand, find the gun-running business attendant upon such conflict situations extremely lucrative and gleefully remain involved.

> *"... the unconditional surrender of the racist regimes — at least in Zimbabwe and Namibia — would likely come as a result of continued armed struggle."*

The conflict situations in Southern Africa — Zimbabwe, Namibia and Azania collectively — assume a different character. In those enclaves, progressive liberation forces who are allied with the socialist camp are pitted against reactionary and racist regimes.

Western diplomatic strategists have so far reacted by offering to mediate a settlement of each conflict situation through peace plans worked out in places like Washington and London. In any event, the unconditional surrender of the racist regimes — at least in Zimbabwe and Namibia — would likely come as a result of continued armed struggle. In the case of

Azania, it is difficult to anticipate the inevitable turn of events there once Zimbabwe and Namibia capitulate to nationalist forces. Possibly, a fencemending policy by the foe could go a long way to restrict the conflict within the bounds of civilized accommodation.

The raging plague of Africa requires a thorough purification of the social environment in order to provide a lasting cure. Ironically, the right answers still lie in the old dreams: The formation of a continental union government and a military High Command.

If a continental government offers the best hope for finding lasting solutions to Africa's woes and problems, its attainment seems a fairly remote possibility. Certain options become imperatives in the interim. In the first place, the nations of Africa should strive for economic self-sufficiency at least within regional groupings. This would require positive steps that would give meaning to the widely laundered theories of self-reliance and functional cooperation within regional economic unions. In this regard, a new meaning must be given to the concept of development which should now be seen as the attempt to provide for the material needs of a people through the maximum utilization of the resources of their own environment.

Similarly, the level of development of particular African societies should cease to be measured by the volume and sophistication of the imports which its people use. Development within the African context should reflect the extent to which the good life is supported through the utilization of resources available in the African environment. It is a false hope to expect to make a distinctively African contribution to world civilization by manipulating non-African artifacts. In other words, the existing appendage economic systems should give way to national economies which would ensure that the material needs of the African people are met through African resources. Widespread dependence upon authentic African reci-

pes, for example, would curtail imports and reduce or even eliminate national nutritional dependence on the generosity of foreign powers.

The second and equally urgent need is for the African states to develop credible deterrence capabilities. Such a program should include the formation of regional defense pacts, joint research into the development of weapons technology and the total exclusion of non-African fighting personnel from every independent African state.

". . . the patchwork of African states share identical national interests and therefore common national enemies."

The nation-states of Africa, collectively constitute a natural security community: The high rate of communication and contact across national frontiers is unlikely to diminish in view of the strength of cross-national ethnic links on the one hand, and the strength of the pan-Africanist fervor on the other hand. Besides, the relative absence of entrenched ideological rivalry among the African states and the universal nature of the problems and goals of the individual states reduces the likelihood of intractable conflict situations and holds up prospects for cooperation among African states.

Thus, although very often at odds with each other, the patchwork of African states share identical national interests and therefore common national enemies. A tacit, and perhaps unwitting expression of the identity of interests among the African states, is the unbroken history of close diplomatic cooperation on a myriad of issues of mutual interest since the formation of the OAU. But effective diplomacy is one that is supported by a credible deterence capability.

It is imperative, therefore, that once they adopt common foreign policy goals, the African states should provide the military

establishment necessary to support the pursuit of those goals. This means that the establishment of inter-state, then regional military groups should proceed along with the establishment of cultural and economic links among the states of the continent.

By pooling their military resources into large regional units, the African states would be in a position to effectively deter foreign mercenary adventurers from manipulating African issues to their own advantage.

As a corollary to the establishment of at least regional military forces, the development of military science, rooted in the African environment, should be vigorously promoted. In other words, African weapons and African fighting methods should progressively replace the existing total dependence on external aid so as to ensure meaningful deterrence capability.

There is need also for the promotion of ideological communion throughout Africa, if only to ensure easy identification of the continent's common enemies and common friends. In other words, the same scruples that ruffle the minds of the Western free enterprise world about Communist gains in Italy (since 1976) and Russian missile build-up in Cuba (1960-62) and which cause discomfiture in the Kremlin over growing liberalism in Czechoslovakia, (1968-69) should arouse the concern of African leaders when their neighbors make overtures to the common enemy. The instruction of the celebrated Edmund Burke of 18th century British political fame is that ". . . whenever our neighbor's house is on fire, it cannot be amiss for the engines to play a little on our own." □

Gilbert Bluwey, Ph.D., is an assistant professor with the Social Sciences Department at Howard University.