

Setting the Stage

CHAPTER 1

PROSPECTS FOR PEACE AND SECURITY IN AFRICA

ENDURING LEGACIES OF COLONIALISM AND THE COLD WAR

Colonialism stunted Africa's political, economic, and social development. During the nineteenth century's "scramble for Africa," European powers partitioned the continent into arbitrary territorial units. The colonies that emerged often lacked internal cohesiveness, and differences and antagonisms among various indigenous groups were frequently exploited and exacerbated. Africans were given virtually no voice in political affairs. Designed to support the needs of the colonial powers, colonial economies required largely unskilled labour, and education was neglected. Generally, colonial powers did not prepare African countries for statehood, which most achieved during the 1960s. (See Table 1.1 for years when African States became United Nations Members.)

Not surprisingly, therefore, decolonization created a new set of challenges which the first generation of African statesmen were ill-equipped to handle. Transitions to independence were frequently bloody affairs. Despite the pragmatic decision of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to accept colonial borders under the doctrine of *uti possidetis*¹ ("as you hold possession by right"), the existence of poorly defined and controversial borders throughout the continent has contributed to conflicts and will likely

¹ See "Charter of the Organization of African Unity," 25 May 1963, reprinted in *International Legal Materials*, Vol. 3, 1963, Article 3.3, p. 766; see also "OAU Resolution on Border Disputes," 21 July 1964, cited in Ian Brownlie, *Principles of Public International Law (Fourth Edition)*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 135.

Table 1.1

Membership of African States in the United Nations		
UN Member State	Year of Admission	Total
Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia, South Africa*	1945	4
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	1955	5
Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia	1956	8
Ghana	1957	9
Guinea	1958	10
Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Gabon, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Togo, Zaire	1960	26
Mauritania, Sierra Leone, United Republic of Tanzania	1961	29
Algeria, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda	1962	33
Kenya	1963	34
Malawi, Zambia	1964	36
Gambia	1965	37
Botswana, Lesotho	1966	39
Equatorial Guinea, Mauritius, Swaziland	1968	42
Guinea-Bissau	1974	43
Cape Verde, Comoros, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe	1975	47
Angola, Seychelles	1976	49
Djibouti	1977	50
Zimbabwe	1980	51
Namibia	1990	52
Eritrea	1993	53

* Founding Members of the United Nations.

pose greater problems as resources become increasingly scarce.² In light of the ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity within those preordained borders, individual African States have found it difficult to build “national” identities.

The cold war had a profound effect on African Governments and security. Both the Soviet Union and the United States courted newly-independent African States (as well as liberation movements) in an effort to win converts to their respective causes. As a result, they often supported authoritarian, corrupt, and oppressive Governments. While Moscow and Washington helped fuel several conflicts on the continent by supplying significant armaments to States and rebel groups, they also kept some conflicts from erupting.³

With the end of the superpower rivalry, many African leaders could not continue to rely on the accustomed backing of an outside power to lend much-needed political legitimacy and financial and military support to their regimes. The US no longer needed to coddle African leaders in exchange for their allegiance. Russia no longer had the means to provide assistance, and Cuba, the former Soviet Union’s surrogate in Africa, agreed to withdraw its troops serving on the continent. Several colonial powers that had maintained

² While African countries have largely accepted the status quo for fear of opening a Pandora’s Box, the doctrine of *uti possidetis* will increasingly come under attack. See I. William Zartman, *Ripe for Resolution: Conflict and Intervention in Africa (Updated Edition)*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 15.

³ Stephanie Neuman argues that although both superpowers used military assistance to compete for influence, they exercised restraint, especially during periods of heightened tension. During the early stages of the war between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1977, for example, Moscow and Washington initially were reluctant to provide the level of support requested. The Soviet Union did not begin to provide the large-scale shipments of *matériel* to the new Government in Addis Ababa until after the US had clearly indicated it was distancing itself from the conflict. See Stephanie Neuman, *Military Assistance in Recent Wars: The Dominance of the Superpowers*, New York: Praeger, 1986, pp. 31-32.

an elevated interest in their old colonies⁴ also began to reduce their exposure and commitments. As a result, African leaders could no longer depend upon the political and economic support of an outside power to lend much-needed political legitimacy and financial and military support to their regimes. Disgruntled and oppressed groups began to more openly and forcefully challenge the legitimacy of these leaders, and their weakened regimes were increasingly susceptible to domestic unrest and violence.

DECLINE OF THE STATE

African leaders themselves helped create many of today's crises. The style of Government pervasive on the African continent has not been conducive to development, democracy, and peace. Many leaders of the newly-independent African countries tried to impose national unity by consolidating political and economic power in the State. Governments became bloated, inefficient bureaucracies and corruption was often rampant and tolerated. As United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan has written:

It is frequently the case that political victory assumes a 'winner-takes-all' form with respect to wealth and resources, patronage, and the prestige and prerogatives of office. ... Where there is insufficient accountability of leaders, lack of transparency in regimes, inadequate checks and balances, non-adherence to the rule of law, absence of peaceful means to change or replace leadership, or lack of respect for human rights, political control becomes excessively important, and the stakes become dangerously high. This situation is exacerbated when, as is often the case in Africa, the State is the major provider of employment and political parties are largely either regionally or ethnically based.⁵

⁴ France's preservationist instinct was the strongest, and it committed itself to a proactive and interventionist policy throughout independent francophone Africa. Other former colonial powers also attempted to protect their legacies in their former territorial possessions, albeit generally with less resolve and success.

⁵ UN Document A/52/871-S/1998/318, *The causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa: Report of the Secretary-General*, 13 April 1998, para. 12.

Many African States' economic and fiscal policies have failed, and largely Western-imposed "solutions" have created new problems. After the prices for many of their exports slumped in the 1970s, African States borrowed heavily to maintain Government expenditures. Initially, Western States and institutions readily lent them money on the shared and erroneous expectation that commodity prices would recover. By and large, African countries did not invest the borrowed funds prudently and their debts mounted. Waste and corruption exacerbated the situation. International financial institutions subsequently restricted access to international loans. The long-term results of the policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are controversial.⁶ There is general agreement, however, on the short-term results: the economies and social structures of many African countries have experienced great stress. Servicing their debts has become the chief financial preoccupation for many African States.

Social responsibilities that were once the purview of the State have increasingly been substantially ignored or subcontracted to others with varying degrees of success. International private voluntary organizations (PVOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and numerous United Nations bodies have become even more involved in the development, education, and health sectors. Yet even with outside assistance the State is finding it difficult to cope. For example, the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) pandemic has had a devastating impact on the continent. Eighty-three per cent of all AIDS-related deaths have been recorded in sub-Saharan Africa, and seven out of 10 people infected with the virus in 1998 live there.⁷

⁶ Some question the efficacy of the reforms, for example, charging that the political élite have managed to retain their influence and have continued to enrich themselves at the expense of the general populace notwithstanding the measures imposed. They argue that the stated ends will not be realized regardless of the means employed. See, for example, Peter Lock, "Africa, Military Downsizing and the Growth in the Security Industry," in Jakkie Cilliers and Peggy Mason (eds), *Peace, Profit or Plunder?: The Privatization of Security in War-Torn African Societies*, Halfway House: Institute for Security Studies, 1999, pp. 17-19.

⁷ "AIDS: IRIN Special Report on AIDS in Africa," 1 December 1998, available on the Internet at <<<http://www.notes.reliefweb.int>>>. See also "A global (continued...)"

States are also finding it difficult to provide for their own security. Many African military do not possess the human and material resources or the discipline and inclination to defend the State. Indeed, in the extreme case of Sierra Leone, Government soldiers are not simply unmotivated and corrupt, they are subversive.⁸ To establish and maintain order, African States have called upon private security firms (or “corporate mercenaries”). Some see these firms as providing useful services to the State⁹—as long as their bills are paid.¹⁰ Others are far less sanguine. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the question of the use of mercenaries, Enrique Bernales Ballesteros, has called private security companies “the biggest and most sophisticated threat to the peace, sovereignty and self-determination of the peoples of many countries.”¹¹

Indeed, political, economic, social, and military challenges to the State have been so great that some have ceased to function and the international

⁷ (...continued)

disaster,” *The Economist*, 2 January 1999, pp. 40-42.

⁸ The civil war there has bred a class of “sobels”—soldiers by day, rebels by night. See, for example, Herbert M. Howe, “Private security forces and African stability: the case of Executive Outcomes,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 1998, pp. 313-14.

⁹ For example, many Sierra Leoneans and foreign diplomats credited the firm Executive Outcomes (EO) with restoring some semblance of order to the country in 1996 so elections could be held. (Elizabeth Rubin, “An Army of One’s Own,” *Harper’s Magazine*, February 1997, pp. 48-49.) Such companies are typically well-equipped to deal with low-intensity, high casualty civil wars. (David Shearer, “Outsourcing War,” *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1998, p. 70.) Moreover, they are willing to take casualties, fire decisively, and use overwhelming force. Elizabeth Rubin, “Saving Sierra Leone, At a Price,” *The New York Times*, 4 February 1999.

¹⁰ William Reno stresses that although EO was effective, they departed as soon as the Government no longer paid them, at the expense of the people they were charged to protect. William Reno, “Privatizing the War in Sierra Leone,” *Current History*, May 1997, p. 229.

¹¹ UN Document A/53/338, *Report on the question of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination submitted by the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights*, 4 September 1998, para. 21(l).

community's attempts to reverse this trend have failed. Following the particularly devastating civil wars in Liberia and Somalia, and in the immediate wake of the genocide in Rwanda, the renowned African scholar Ali Mazrui actually proposed that parts of Africa be *re-colonized* for humanitarian purposes until such time when the State would be prepared to govern effectively and humanely.¹² Although his radical proposal for the establishment of a neo-UN trusteeship system is as unlikely today as it was then, the concerns Mazrui raised in 1994 are still valid.

REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RISE OF INTRA-STATE CONFLICT

The inability of States to put their own houses in order is not simply an internal matter. The proliferation of rebel movements, small arms, and refugees all adversely affect a State's ability to govern, and they threaten regional security. Intra-State conflicts are spilling over national borders with greater frequency and assuming regional dimensions.

Whereas States have historically supported—or denied support for—insurgencies in other countries as a means of retaining or gaining influence, their abilities to control rebel movements have diminished. Some of these groups are sufficiently independent that they have themselves reportedly contracted mercenaries.¹³ They are often able to finance their activities by exploiting natural resources such as diamonds and timber in areas under their control. One-fifth of the global diamond market is reportedly supplied by African rebel groups.¹⁴ The United Nations International Commission of Inquiry (ICOI) for Rwanda in its November 1998 report stressed that several of the more than 20 rebel groups active in the

¹² Ali A. Mazrui, "Decaying Parts of Africa Need Benign Colonization," *The International Herald Tribune*, 4 August 1994, p. 6.

¹³ See, for example, David Shearer, "Private Armies and Military Intervention," *Adelphi Paper 316*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, February 1998, p. 69.

¹⁴ Christine Gordan, "Rebels' Best Friend," *BBC Focus on Africa Magazine*, October-December 1999, available on the Internet at <<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/focus>>>.

Great Lakes region of Africa collaborate with one another,¹⁵ many independent of State patrons. The *Interahamwe* militia together with members of the former army of the Government of Rwanda, which continue to wage a war against Kigali, have assisted rebel groups fighting the Governments of Burundi and Uganda.¹⁶

Vast quantities of weapons, especially small arms, used to fight wars of independence, civil wars, and insurgencies remain in circulation and help fuel present conflicts. Many African Governments simply cannot monitor the movement of small arms within their countries or across their borders—although some are endeavouring to develop such a capacity.¹⁷ Other African Governments lack the political will to do so. Despite some highly publicized African initiatives to destroy small arms and ammunition,¹⁸ light weapons will continue to be cheap, accessible, and available in great quantities. National and international laws and regulations to counter this illicit trade are frequently circumvented and haphazardly enforced. Even if embargoes were respected, the huge stockpiles of weapons on the continent would continue to circulate from one conflict to another. Surplus small arms in Eastern Europe will continue to find their way onto the continent.

¹⁵ UN Document S/1998/1096, Annex, *Final report of the International Commission of Inquiry (Rwanda)*, 18 November 1998, para. 88.

¹⁶ See UN Document S/1998/777, Annex, *Interim report of the International Commission of Inquiry (Rwanda)*, 19 August 1998, paras. 32-36, and 46-58.

¹⁷ For example, on 31 October 1998, the Heads of State and Government of the 16-nation Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) pledged to cease producing, importing, and exporting small arms and light weapons for an initial three-year period. A framework to operationalize the political agreement is to be constructed, known as the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED). See UN Document A/53/763 - S/1998/1194, Annex, *Declaration of a Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa*, 18 December 1998. The ECOWAS Secretariat is to play an active role in PCASED, which will be developed under the aegis of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs (DDA).

¹⁸ For background on the successful case of Mali, see Robin-Edward Poulton and Ibrahim ag Youssouf, *A Peace of Timbuktu: Democratic Governance, Development and African Peacemaking*, Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 1998.

Moreover, in 1998 African countries imported large weapons systems at an increasing rate. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), in 1998 the regional arms market in sub-Saharan Africa grew by more than 50 per cent from the previous year.¹⁹

Like arms flows, movements of people will continue to have profound repercussions on African security. As of January 1999, there were 6.5 million “people of concern” to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Africa, which included refugees, internally-displaced persons (IDPs), and recent returnees.²⁰ The problem is much greater, however, than even this large number suggests, as UNHCR handles only a relatively small percentage of the continent’s IDPs. According to the U.S. Committee for Refugees, the number of IDPs in Africa surpassed 8 million in 1998. Sixteen African States produced newly uprooted populations in 1998.²¹ Countries often have insufficient infrastructures to deal with the influx and migrations of people, and conflicts over scarce resources frequently arise. Moreover, rebels sometimes use refugee camps to regroup and as bases from which to launch attacks. (The fact that many refugee camps are situated near borders facilitates such activities.)

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The challenges to African peace and security defy easy solutions. Many conflicts are multifaceted and deeply entrenched. They require sustained diplomatic and military engagement to move towards resolving them. Peacekeeping forces have a potentially significant role to play in this process.

¹⁹ Expenditures in sub-Saharan Africa for both military services and equipment were estimated to have risen from US\$ 1.0 billion in 1997 to US\$ 1.7 billion in 1998. See International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1999/2000*, London: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 247.

²⁰ The figure included 3.3 million refugees, 2.1 million internally-displaced persons (IDPs), and 1.1 million recent returnees. “UNHCR Country Updates - Africa Fact Sheet,” *UN High Commissioner for Refugees*, 2 June 1999, available on the Internet at <<<http://www.notes.reliefweb.int>>>.

²¹ U.S. Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey, 1999*, Washington, DC: U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1999.