

The Political Economy of Multilateral Conflict Management Efforts in Africa

N. M. Oluwafemi Mimiko
Department of Political Science,
Ondo State University, Ado-Ekiti.

Introduction

A great deal of attention, is usually focused on the security crises that have broken out in quick succession in Africa since the end of the Cold War, and the multilateral management efforts of same. Such institutional responses are certainly in order, in so far as they serve to reduce the scale of human suffering attendant upon these crises. Nevertheless, they neither ensure that the particular crises isolated for management do not erupt again after a momentary cooling off period, nor that new ones do not breakout.

This reality calls for *a* new approach to security studies and inevitably, a fresh response to these crisis situations. By its very nature, conflict management as presently undertaken by the international community is largely curative and reactive. Its basic essence consists in the containment of full-blown crises, which since the end of the Cold War have tended to be intra-state in nature. This approach and orientation foreclose the possibility of managing crises when it is just at its incipient stage. That is, rather than making multilateral efforts purely reactive and curative, as it were, they can and-should be made more proactive and preventive.

Thus, apart from the need to examine the fundamental issues relating to the nature, aim, and scope, which extant multilateral conflict management efforts raise, there is also the need for a correct appreciation of the real nature and character of these crises. It is upon this, that the types of refocusing of intellectual and practical efforts; which we are calling for, can be predicted.

What is the economic basis of these crises? .What is the nature of extant multilateral conflict management efforts? In what:

specific ways would the international community have prevented the eruptions? To what extent can the *UN* or *OAU* systems undertake successful preventive actions? What roles, do regional organizations and NGOs have in these crisis situations? What inhibitions or support can the state constitute or provide, as the case may be, to foreign efforts to execute a wholly preventive agenda in the more crisis-prone regions of Africa? These are some of the more crucial problematic this paper addresses.

For, systematic analysis, the paper is divided into, five sections. Section one is the introduction. Section two is an attempt at the exploration of the economic basis of the new security crises. In section three, the nature, problems and prospect of extant multilateral conflict management efforts are examined. This dovetails into section four where dimensions of preventive conflict management are explored. Section five is the conclusion.

The political economy approach, which treats social and material issues in their relatedness in analysis, is adopted as the framework of analysis. It enables us to transcend the more peripheral question usually addressed in much of extant literature on the subject. Without denying the meta-economic factors facilitating then- outbreak for instance, it allows us to perceive all the major security crises that have broken out in Africa in the post-Cold War era as but a manifestation of underlying economic crisis. It is always a case of lack and/or loss of economic opportunities. This in turn breeds alienation, frustration, rebellion and ultimately political violence and instability. Ethnic, clan or religious consciousness and exclusivity are only the vehicles through which mass economic frustration gets canalized and demonstrated.

Perceived in this light, it becomes clear why Africa, by every yardstick of measurement, the globe's most backward and hopeless economic case is leading the world in the number of intensity and atavism of intra-state security crises.

Economic Crisis and Political Instability in Africa: The Interface

Political instability is substantially a manifestation of particular economic processes. It arises when political order is no longer broadly accepted in a given society. This occurs when society is in a state of "multi dysfunction" unable to cope with various pressures for change, which may originate from within or outside the system. Dominant political and economic elites usually always resist such pressures. And as the current of change gets stronger, they resort to violence, physical or psychological, to maintain the status-quo.

But such recourse to violence by dominant social forces to contain the pressures-for change invariably serve to compound the problem. Inevitably, discordant, rather than orderly changes in the system occur as the forces of change, organised or inchoate, seek to meet violence. These discordant changes equate political instability.

Frustration-aggression Thesis

Of all the theories explaining political instability, that on frustration-aggression, popularised by Feierabend and Nesvold (1971:569-604), is perhaps the most apt for this study. The authors conceive systemic frustration as deriving from the inability of the political system to meet the legitimate expectations and aspirations of the people - both material and otherwise.

Systemic frustration on its own ordinarily engenders aggression on the part of the frustrated. But the problem for the political system arises in a situation in which the dispossessed, the disgruntled, and the frustrated members of the polity are able to establish a linkage between their material depravity and the political system (Fawole, 1994: 11 -23). Political aggression, which is a precipitate of collective frustration, thus becomes directed, in different forms, against the political system. The system aches, and depending on its resilience, ultimately breaks down. This is what has largely manifested as State failure in sundry African countries.

More than anything else, the basis of systemic frustration on the part of contemporary Africans lies in the monumental economic failure that has come to define the continent's history, arguably since political independence.

There exists an extensive body of literature on the African economic condition (Mimiko, 1995:20-43). We are thus not going to be detained by the issue here. But suffice it to note that Africans are known to have gotten poorer at an average rate of 1.2% per annum between 1980 and 1989. Output per head fell by 0.6% during 1987-1994 (Sachs, 1996:21). In the specific case of President Mobutu's Zaire for example, growth rate fell precipitously from 14.6% in 1993 to 7.2% in 1994 and -0.6% in 1995. In 1994, inflation rate was 6000%. Although the world's foremost producer of industrial diamonds, Zaire paid its workers "by far the lowest wages in the whole of independent Africa." But even this remained unpaid for the 26 months preceding the commencement of the armed campaign of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL) in October 1996 (Africa Today, 1996:38-39).

Apart from the reality of the deepening crisis of the African economy, the place of the developmental State which made some allowance for the weakest segments of the society in terms, for instance, of subsidising specific public utilities, has been considerably eroded from the 1980s with the global resurgence of neo-liberalism. The implication is that there are no longer social safety nets of any kind as even the extended family relations get increasingly assailed. Thus for the first time, Africans have since 1980s come face to face with the reality of material poverty and the attenuation of hope.

Delegitimisation of the State

The frustration-aggression thesis worked in conjunction with the emergent inversion of the role of the State to engender the acute delegitimisation of the State that facilitated the explosion that

much of Africa has come to represent. The process is simple enough. Fractions of the elite that got State power at independence quickly privatized same. They turned the State into a veritable instrument of persecution and repression of both real and imagined enemies.

In the circumstance, the interests of the ruling elites, and invariably of the "Strongman," were re-defined as synonymous with the interests of the State. Oppositions to such interests thus became criminalised, qualifying for the most heinous form of repression.

Such personal political animosity against particular opposition figures soon got transferred to the opponents' own ethnic group. The State became very threatening, leaving the disfavoured ethnic group no other choice than to turn inwards into the ethnic enclave Where the only semblance of love, protection and hope exists.

Patterns of Resistance

It must be noted that the pattern of resistance to change on the part of ruling elites, and the attendant delegitimation of State is the same in virtually the whole of Africa. How the ensuing frustration on the part of the mass of the people gets canalised and expressed is what differs. As Ihonvbere (1994:7-19) avers:

The condition of economic and political decay are common to all African social formations without exception. The manifestation of the crisis ... differs only in terms of the, resiliency of the State, the nature and power of the contending constituencies, the degree of external support and interest, in the economy, the structural integration of production and exchange forces, {the character of leadership and national constituencies.

In much of Africa, this social atrophy has manifested as ethnic conflict, encouraging the widely held assumption that ethnicity constitutes the bane of the African society. But as it has been variously argued, ethnic diversity on its own is not inherently divisive (Ake, 1989, UNRISD, 1995:95 -109). It, however, comes

in handy as an instrument of giving expression to accumulated frustration.

This explains why until the monumental and dramatic political and economic changes (liberalisation) of the 1980s, and the attendant social dislocations, ethnic antagonism was not as extensive in the continent as it is today. And certainly anything near the genocidal carnage witnessed in the Great Lakes region in the early 1990s could not have been imaginable. Even so, it must be noted that the nature of the crisis in Africa is such that ethnicity has come to take a life of its own, almost completely severing all links with its material origins.

As well, in many cases, the outbreak of civil war and the sustenance of such is greatly enhanced by the activities of transnational companies. While these corporate bodies are motivated strictly by profit, their interests invariably provide the direction which the foreign policy of their home country must follow in relation to their host countries (Cox, 1994): Many of these companies go as far as exploiting the existing ethnic cleavages in their efforts to secure specific advantages for themselves. That was why for instance, Belgian Mining concerns supported the Moïse Thombe secession bid in Zaire (Akinterinwa and Obi, 1997: 5 & 13); and French oil conglomerates were towed to Ojukwu's Biafra in Nigeria (Ihonvbere,

1986:156 -172). As well, immediately it became obvious that Mobutu Sese Seko had no chance of survival by early May 1997, De Beer's representative had openly met with Laurent Kabila in Coma "to discuss issues relating to the protection of Staff and facilities" in areas of then Zaire controlled by his *troops* (The Guardian, 1997:8).

The Nature and Limits of Extant Multilateral Conflict Management Efforts

It has been noted earlier CHI in this paper that one of the more important features of extant multilateral conflict management

efforts is their largely reactive and curative orientation. This is partly a function of the difficulty States usually have in defining what or which situations are capable of leading to crisis, and more importantly, which is the best way to confront such. The process of arriving at a consensus on these crucial issues takes much time, ensuring that the incipient crisis that should have been contained actually gets folly-blown before an adequate strategy is evolved.

Another critical feature of the prevailing multilateral conflict management mechanism relates to its means. Although it tries to employ non-military means on an increasing basis (e.g. attending to refugees, monitoring elections, etc), the dominant method of multilateral conflict management is still military-peace-keeping, or peace-enforcement operations. This fundamental orientation makes a number of problems inevitable. The first relates to what has been described as "regime abandonment." This according to the Commonwealth Institute (1993:6), describes a situation in which

The nations, most likely to get involved in a particular third party dispute would tend to take sides in accord with their immediate national interests. By contrast, nations with sufficient strategic distance from the conflict to take a relatively impartial view would most often avoid involvement altogether, also in accord with immediate national interest

These tendencies tend to promote delay in brokering an agreement that can facilitate direct multilateral intervention in a crisis situation at the most auspicious time before it gets out of hand.

The second problem relates to "free-loading" - a situation in which even nations that view the good functioning of the regime as in their interest may neglect to contribute *to* its maintenance as long as other nations are willing to bear the burden. (Commonwealth Institute, 1994:6). The fear of "free-loading" informs the prevarications associated with interventions in conflict

situations on the part of even nations possessing the wherewithal for such.

The fact that armed interventions tend to get graduated along the line, compound these problems. US-led "Operation Restore Hope" in Somalia commenced in 1991 with a limited objective of securing "the ports and major cities in order to guarantee the delivery and distribution of food and relief materials to the Somalis." By the time the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) was created in April 1992, it deployed 50 unarmed cease-fire monitors and 500 troops. By August 1992, the forces had increased to 4,200 troops. As well, by the time the standing and Mediation Committee of ECOWAS met in Banjul in August 1990 to set up ECOMOG, the aim was "to create the necessary conditions for normal life to resume to the benefit of all Liberians." At this initial stage, nobody expected ECOMOG to get involved in combat, but just to monitor cease-fire. It was later that its involvement got "graduated by the circumstances on the ground" (Iweze, 1994).

The problems of command, control and communication also tend to paralyse multilateral conflict management efforts in Africa. Iweze (1994) brought some personal insights to bear on explicating how the innocuous issue of the status of commanding officers almost paralysed the operations of ECOMOG in the early 1990s.

In relation to control, while a multilateral force is expected to take directives from the Force Commander, one always finds a situation in which each contingent insists "on obtaining clarifications" from home on specific issues.

Communication problems derive from the fact that different armies operate and use different communication devices and strategies. Getting the differently oriented forces to work together under a multilateral arrangement usually creates problems. Such a synthesis of forces and orientation not only necessitates a re-orientation of the troops, it also makes the procurement of a new

set of communication equipment imperative. These make multilateral conflict management efforts too expensive for most African countries to undertake. They also invariably increase the import of logistic support from richer countries, many of whom may not necessarily share the aspirations of African nations intent on quick intervention in a crisis situation.

The above dovetails into the issue of the cost of multilateral conflict management efforts, the cost of peace-keeping operations is astronomical. At the last count, Nigeria for instance, has committed in excess of \$4 billion to the ECOMOG involvement in Liberia. Even the UN, an organisation that lays claim to universal membership, groans under the heavy bill of its sundry peacekeeping operations. In 1992 alone, peace-keeping cost the UN in excess of N3 billion-more than three times any previous figure (Boutrous-Ghali, 1995: 16).

Towards a Preventive Multilateral Conflict Management Effort

Evolving anew, cheaper and more effective conflict management effort in the post-Cold War era would involve making such proactive rather than reactive. This is predicated on UNESCO's affirmation of the obvious that "preventing conflicts or resolving them without resorting to violence is possible." (UNESCO, 1995:29).

As had been demonstrated in Section II of this paper, the critical underpinning for conflicts in Africa has always been economic and material deprivation. The deeper the prevailing economic crisis in Africa becomes therefore, the more extensive security crises are expected to become in the continent. What needs to be done therefore is to evolve ways and means of tackling the economic crisis without which we cannot begin to talk of conflict prevention. Strategies of bringing about sustainable economic growth and development are beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to note, however, that the process of transformation needed to

place the African economy on the pedestal of sustainable development is a form of change process that needs to be carefully managed if it is not to become a new basis of crisis.

There is the need, for instance, to provide a functional and well-funded social welfare net which can help in providing a stable context for on-going political and economic reform. This is one of the more damaging oversights of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in Africa. The poor got increasingly impoverished with virtually no safety net under an economic regime that invariably enhances the competitive edge of the powerful.

Since the persecution and repression of minority groups - ethnic, clan, religious-constitute one of the more crucial manifestations of conflict in the continent, it is high time that Africa and indeed the global community evolved "a global standard for the treatment of ethnic and national minorities" (Commonwealth Institute, 1993:4). What we are calling for is something more definitive and specific than the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And because ethnic identification has the potential to "totalize-to transcend other loyalties and obligations and become the sole basis of identity" (UNRISD, 1995:95), it must be the primary focus of this code.

A concomitant of such a code is the imperative of democratisation in Africa. Much of the problem of group suppression in many African countries have their logic in the philosophy of authoritarianism. In place of the highly closed political structure of old, Africa needs to evolve very inclusive political arrangements.

Many African countries had their first ever free and fair post-independence election beginning from the late 1980s, under intense pressure from the Western aid donors. It is, however, doubtful whether such elections have thrown up any form of democratisation or democracy. In many cases, what you have has only facilitated the legitimisation of old dictators, and engendered

fresh contradictions - all underscoring the need for thorough and full-scale democratisation.

Restraints must be placed on arms transfer. The case with which a motley of rag-tag armies and militias in Africa get access to light automatic weapons should be a cause of global concern. While the UN should lead the way misunderstanding modalities for restricting access, it is to me G7 and OECD, states that the duty of control must devolve. The G7 states not only control 70% of gross world product, but also 45% of world military expenditures. For the OECT), the figures are 80% and 55% respectively (Commonwealth Institute, 1993:3).

One of the forces which promotes crises in the African continent is the prevailing myth about the sanctity of the principle of sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States. Sundry dictators that created the enabling environment for crisis to erupt in their countries had hidden under this principle to perpetrate atrocity. It also serves the inglorious need of African governments, which are quick to plead the principles of sovereignty and non-interference to justify their criminal docility and silence in the face of atrocities, perpetrated in neighbouring States.

The basic contradiction faced by African countries on these issues is manifested in their resolution at the 28th Summit Meeting of the QAU in Dakar, June 1994. They established a Conflict Resolution Mechanism, designed, purportedly, "To bring to the process of dealing with conflicts in Africa a new institutional dynamism, enabling speedy action to prevent or manage and ultimately resolve conflicts when and where they occur." (*The West African Bulletin*, 1995:19)

While declaring as its primary objective "the anticipation and prevention of conflict," the OAU nevertheless allowed itself to be encumbered by the principles of sovereignty and non-interference. The Mechanism, it pointed out, will be guided by the principles of sovereignty and non-interference. The Mechanism, it pointed out,

will be guided by the Objectives and principles of the OAU charter; in particular, the sovereign equality of member States, non-interference in the internal affairs of States, the respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member States (Ibid.). In view of the constraining nature of these commitments, the OAU needs to evolve a new orientation that would permit a more elastic consideration of the principles of sovereignty and non-interference, if the basis of Africa's festering crisis is to be attacked before such degenerate into real, more destructive and quite expensive situations. Africa must be guided by one of the "Providence Principles of Humanitarian Action in Armed Conflict," which states unequivocally that "where humanitarianism and sovereignty clash, sovereignty, must defer to the relief of life-threatening suffering" (Ferris, 1993). In any case, there is validity in the thesis if-at "sovereignty rests with the people and when a government violates the rights of those people, it forfeits its claim to national sovereignty." (Ibid).

A system "to streamline and consolidate procedures for the imposition and enforcement of economic sanctions under the auspices of the UN and involving world economic bodies," has been suggested as a form of non-military conflict prevention instrument (Commonwealth Institute 1993: 5). According to the Commonwealth Institute (1913: 5).

The UN should retain a substantial corps of sanction monitors and be prepared to discipline States that violate sanctions. To improve compliance, the body should also maintain a compensation fund for innocent third parties who 'suffer disproportionately from the Imposition of sanctions against their trading partners. Finally, the body should bolster the positive inducements as well—for instance offering substantial reconstruction and to combatants who comply with UN directives.

Finally, in relation to purely military instrument, the question of creating an international rapid deployment force - UN Command, OAU High Command, etc. -has been suggested. While

considerable problems relating to funding, control, and command, etc., cannot but arise vis-à-vis the setting up of such a force as for instance, ECOMOG has demonstrated, the critical issue remains that of political will. With the requisite will, such an instrument can be setup. This is the context in which the US effort to train, arm and fund a 10,000 man force for rapid intervention purposes in Africa must be perceived. So also UN Secretary General Kofi Anan's averment that the organisation is putting together a mechanism to monitor cessation of hostilities and create the necessary environment to facilitate a negotiated settlement in crisis situations (in Obibi, 1997:15).

Conclusion

Overall, the perspective canvassed above will be a more effective and efficient approach to conflict management: It certainly is better than allowing all the other spots that are presently simmering in Africa to blow out. Liberia, Somalia, Algeria, Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, Sierra Leone, Congo, Guinea Bissau, etc. are surely not isolated cases. An Obibi (1997:15) notes, "the building to each conflict is often similar to the other". Allowing all the hotspots to blow out before talking of containment would certainly tax the resources and patience of Africans and their few friends beyond limit.

References

- Ake, C. (1983), "How Politics underdeveloped Africa," in J.O. Ihonvbere (ed.), *The political Economy of Crisis and Underdevelopment in Africa: Selected Works of Claude Ake*, Lagos, JAD. Africa Today, (1996), London, Jan/Feb.
- Akinterinwa, B. and Obi, A. (1997), "The UN and Kabila's Congo Again," *THISDAY*, Lagos, Oct 12
- Boutrous-Ghali, B. (1995), "Peace-making, peacekeeping, peace-building," *The West African Bulletin*, 3, Lagos: ECOWAS Secretariat, Department of information, June.
- Cox, R.W. (1994), *Power and Profits: US Policy in Central America*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

- Fawote, W. A. (1995), "The Military and the Future of Democracy in Africa", in O. Omoruyi, et al (eds), *Democratisation in African Perspectives*, Vol. ft, Abuja: Centre for Democratic Studies.:
- Feierabend, I K. et al (1917), "Social Change and Political Violence: Cross National Patterns" in J.L.
- Finkle and R.W. Gable (eds), *Political Development and Social Changes*, New York: Wiley and Sons Inc.
- Ihonvbere, J. O. (1986), "The Role of Oil in the Nigerian Civil War, 1967 - 1970," *African Studies*, 10 January.
- Ihonvbere, J. O. (1994). "Beyond Warlords and Clans: The African Crisis and Somali Situation," *International and Third World Studies Journal and Review*, 6.
- Iweze, C.C. (1994), "The International and Multinational Dimensions of ECOMOG Joint Operations," Lagos: National War College, Feb. 15.
- Mimiko, N. O. (1995), "Structural Adjustment and the Deepening of the African Economic Crisis, in (ed.), *Crises and Contradictions in Nigeria's Democratisation Programme, 1986 - 1993*, Akure: Stebak Publishers.
- Obibi, C. (1997), "Zaire: Rebel Guns in spite of Summit," *The Guardian*, Lagos, April 8. Sachs, J. (1996). "Growth in Africa: It can Be Done," *The Economist*, London, June 29. *The Guardian*, (1997). Lagos, April 8.
- The West African Bulletin*, (1995), Lagos, ECOWAS Secretariat Department of Information. UNESCO (1997). In Ibid.
- United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (1995). *States of Disarray: The Social Effects of Globalisation*, Geneva, UNRISD,