Africa in Post-Cold War World Politics

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Abstract

This paper examines Africa in post-Cold War world politics by looking at political, strategic and economic relations in the world. The findings suggest that Africa had suffered marginalization in the past, and is suffering it in post-Cold War world politics. This is because dominant international actors like powerful nations (the US, Britain, France), international organizations (the UN, Commonwealth etc), International Financial Institutions (the IMF, World Bank etc) do not consider Africa as a priority entity in world affairs, yet Africa is coming under more constraints to follow values and beliefs of these same international actors, which has led African states to greater dependence for policy reforms. The consequences have resulted in increased debt, social hardship, environmental degradation, poverty, unemployment, crime, iknter and intra-state conflicts in post-Cold War Africa. The paper concludes that, in addition to collective action, African states should individually redefine and redirect their national interests with a view to enhancing their national power to play active role in the power equation of world politics.

Introduction

In the past, Africa had suffered marginalization, and is suffering it in post-Cold War world politics. The continent is considered relatively unimportant to the outside world and at the same time, it is being subjected to external dictates and constraints. For instance, when we consider political, strategic and economic relations in the world, Africa seemed unimportant to world powers, multinational corporations, international organizations and international financial institutions, but its choice are increasingly determined by these same international actors (Nel and McGowan 1999:151).

It is apt to make some observations on the idea of Africa in world politics. It is fairly inappropriate to speak of Africa as a monolithic entity in world affairs. This is because Africa is

fragmented: by language, religious and cultural differences; by its partition by former colonial powers (Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, Italy and Germany before World War I), and by its vastness, physical terrain, lack of communication and infrastructure (Ibid: 152). Historically, Africa had interacted with Asia for several centuries before the arrival of Europeans to Africa. In a way, the construction of an international system, centered upon the European nation-state and the colonial empires in the 19th century that created the modern idea of Africa as an entity. Africans such as Williams du Bios, Marcus Garvey, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, Casely Hayford and other mentors of black, negro and African nationalism, gain early education, awareness and articulation, vehemently criticized the exploitative colonial venture of European powers (Ejiofor, 1981: 3) and dreamt dreams of Africa's freedom and unity to challenge global disparities of power in order to harness their economically weak and politically divided continent. As a reaction to the colonial intrusion, nationalists from diverse parts of the continent discovered their commonality and 'Africaness' (Mazriu, 1977: 88-97). Colonialism precipitated this awareness as well as promoted divisions that are carried over to the post-colonial era. The political map of Africa numbering 53 states was based largely on the economic and strategic needs of European imperialists and entrenched huge differences in size and in their potentials for nation formation, development and stability (Gorden, 1996: 55). These divisions were lavishly exploited by great power competition in the past and to a lesser degree, in the post-Cold War period.

By and large, Africa in post-Cold War world politics is a system level analysis. The system level analysis adopts a top-bottom approach to the study of world politics. The contention is that international actors operate in a world social-economic-political-geographical environment and that the character of the system helps to determine the pattern of interaction among the actors (Rouke,

1999:54). In this context, Africa is seen as an international actor that operates in a global predictable environment.

The main thrust of this paper therefore, is to logically argue that Africa is suffering marginalization in post-Cold War world politics. For a thorough analysis of the subject matter, we will make haste to explain the Cold War, proceed to address and evaluate Africa in post-Cold War world politics and end with conclusion.

The Cold War

The Cold War was defined by characteristics that concern behavior as well as structure, which underpin a given phase in world history that was epitomized by ideological and strategic confrontation between communism and capitalism. The behavior notion sees the period of the Cold War alternated with periods of detente (1953-60, 1969-75, 1985-90), during which negotiations and tension reduction were firmly on the agenda (Crockett, 1999: 92-110). On the other hand, the structure notion of the meaning of the Cold War does not have any inter space with détente, but maintained the existence of structure continuously throughout the post-World War II period (ibid:99).

The structure perspective, which we subscribed to in this discourse, viewed detente as part of the Cold War period and not change of behaviour. The fundamental structure of the period remains constant. Similarly, the Cold War suggests

> *the extreme state of tension and hostility that developed between Western powers and the communist bloc of Eastern Europe after World War II. The Cold War period has been characterized by political maneuvering, diplomatic wrangling, psychological warfare, ideological hostility, economic warfare, a major arms race, peripheral wars, and other power*

> contests falling short of an all-out 'hot' war (Plano, Greenberg, Olton and
> Riggs, 1973: 62-63).

This was a period of hegemonic competition in ideology and strategy
between the Capitalist Western bloc (the US, Britain, France, Canada,
West German etc.) and the Communist Eastern bloc (the defunct
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), East Germany, Poland,
China, Cuba, Bulgaria etc). The world was divided into two poles,
bipolarity, during the Cold War period with the US and the USSR as
the dominant superpowers. By bipolarity we mean

> *a rigid balance of power system in which decisive power is polarized in two*
> *rival centers.... The bipolar model tends to evolve when, because of security,*
> *ideological, or political difference, states are forced to commit themselves*
> *and group together within the power configuration dominated by either of*
> *the single powers (Ibid:31).*

Increasingly, the two super powers became immersed in
disputes, which generated conflict of interest over issues in various
areas such as the future of Germany in the years after World War 11,
Poland and other Eastern and Central European countries; the
construction of the Berlin Wall in 1948, the hostility between North
Korea/South Korea, the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty
Organization (NATO), Warsaw Pact (1949), 1973 Arab-Israel war,
Armament and Disarmament etc. Africa, Latin America, Asia and
other countries in the world became involved and took sides in these
conflicts that led to the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The immediate roots of the Cold War, at least in broad
structural terms, lay in the intersection of a world devastated by a
global conflict and the conflicting recipes for international order that
the US and the USSR sought to impose on the pliable world shattered
by World War II (McMahon, 2003: 55). By the summer of 1990, the

USSR, US, British, French and Germany agreed that East and West Germany would henceforth anchor to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance. The Cold War ended in 1990 when the USSR accepted a united Germany. The subsequent collapse of the USSR in 1991, which was set in motion by Mikail Govbachev's reforms that proved uncontrollable, was an important historical event, but by the time the USSR disappeared, the Cold War itself was already history (Ibid: 168).

The Post-Cold War Era

The most striking characteristic of the post-Cold War era is the triumph of capitalism over communism, which reflects in ideological and strategic spheres of the world. Ideologically, it was reflected in economic and political arenas. In the economic sphere, the triumph of capitalism represented the end of competition between alternative economic systems; one the means of production owned by the state and in the other, private dominated. Capitalism entails the removal of all obstacles to the operation of the market around the world and transformed the character of world politics. The market economy had operated in some countries in the Cold War period, but now, it has been extended to all countries in the world.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the General Agreement on Trade and Tariff (GATT; later transformed to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1994) were created after World War II to provide the institutional bases for the world economy in pursuit of free trade, while allowing appropriate state intervention in the market in support of national security and national and global stability (Rapley, 1996: 10). These institutions were granted the task of transforming the former centrally planned economic systems to ensure the privatization of the means of production, deregulation of all economic activities, encouragement of competition, balance

budgets, strict adherence to the orthodox liberal economic agenda and integrate into the wider world capitalist economic system. Thus, there was a major shift in international politics from strategic relationship towards a global world economy and how countries might survive and prosper in it.

The championing of liberal economic values played an important role in accelerating the globalization process. The globalization process involves making social relations to acquire relatively distance less and borderless qualities by bringing humanity to increasingly look like a global village (Baylis and Smith, 1999: 5). This is done in such a way that production, exchange and consumption became increasingly to cut across national borders, leading to international economic interdependence. The globalization process is further propagated by technological innovations in transportation and communication, which have made it possible for people, goods and services to circulate around the whole world with little or no hindrance. The consequences of the globalization of the capitalist world economy are that its benefits are unevenly distributed among the people and nations of the world with Africa at the lowest ebb of economic uncertainty. This has led African States to greater external dependence for foreign powers and international economic agencies and due to indebtedness; the IMF and the World Bank have been involved in extensive obligation to bail Africa as well as other economies out of their economic crises. For instance, the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), which typically involved a removal of all market restrictions, such as the relaxation of tariff and taxes to encourage inward investment and external trade; a concomitant liberalization of the labour market to lower wage costs, and a radical cutback of government expenditure, involving the abolition of price controls and subsides on basics (such as food and fuels), the raising charges for services (health and education), the reduction of a number of government employees and privatization of nationalized industries

(Nel and McGowan, 1999: 162). The strategy also involved devaluation of fixed and overhauled foreign exchange to encourage exports, discourage imports and eliminate unofficial currency markets and smuggling. This was to allow for market forces to operate. The SAP underlined the neo-liberal thinking that "state-led development planning has failed, and the remedy involved allowing market forces to operate unhindered by inefficient regulations" (Kiely, 1998: 32).

Though the SAPs started during the Cold War era, but at the turn of the century, over 30 African states had swallowed this bitter pill, but the international financial institutions (IFIs) that prescribed the therapy even became convinced of the fact that the political conditionality promotes or throws up more obstacles to sustainable economic reforms. The adoption of this (SAP) approach to lending has significantly increased the role of these multilateral organizations in policy reform in Africa and other developing countries (Baylis, 1995: 321-337). In fact political conditionality was introduced that linked good governance, accountability, respect for human rights and political reforms to the future of foreign aid and investment (Mbaku and Ihonvbere, 2009: 324). The effect of this is that African states cannot have effective control over economic decision making with growing external indebtedness and mounting social inequalities (Chazan, Lewis, Mortinier, Rothchild and Stedman, 1999: 12). Africa has therefore become even more peripheral to the international political and economic order (Harberson and Rothchild, 1991: 19). Furthermore, African economies are products of colonially bequeathed legacies of disarticulated and dependent economies, which require more integration and interdependence to the global financial system. The unsupportive international economic environment has resulted in increased debt, social hardship, environmental degradation, poverty, crime and intra-state conflicts in post-Cold War Africa.

Interestingly, the post-Cold War era witnessed an advent of great institutional evolution of the continent with the legal transformation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU) on 25th May 2001. The 53 members OAU was established on 25th May 1963, at Adisa Ababa, Ethiopia, and the charter was signed by heads of state and government of 32 African states with the objectives, inter alia, to rid the continent of the remaining vestiges of colonialism and apartheid; to promote unity and solidarity among African states; to coordinate and intensify cooperation for development; to safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states and to promote international cooperation within the framework of the United Nations. The OAU, over the years, provided an effective forum that enables all member states to adopt coordinated position on matters of common interest to the continent in international form and defended the interests of Africa effectively. The OAU worked and spoke as one to forge an international consensus in support of the liberation struggle and fight against apartheid. It realized significant achievements in boundary dispute resolution, defense of member states' sovereignty and territorial integrity, promote African culture, African refugee problem, and in the field of economic and social development, transportation and communication, education and health (Adejo, 2002).

However, the need to reposition the organization in the post – Cold War era in their quest for unity, economic and social development has long been realized. The Abuja treaty established the African Economic Community (AEC) in 1991, which entered into force on 12 May 1994, seeks to create the AEC through six stages culminated in an African common market using the Regional Economic Committees (RECs) as building blocks. This and other initiatives gave rise to the AU. The Sirte Extraordinary Session (1999) established the AU with a view, inter alia, toward accelerating the

process of unity among countries of the continent, enabling it to better participate in the global economy and to better address social, economic and political problems. The Lome summit (2000) adopted the constitutive act of the AU, which specify the objectives, principles and organs of the AU. The Lusaka summit drew the road map for the implementation of the AU and the Durban summit (2002) launched the AU and convened the first Assembly of heads of state of the AU. The AU has already made moderate achievements in its integration efforts and the deployment of African Union Mission in Somalia. However, the AU faces the daunting task of harmonizing the competing national interests of a number of the states and the various definitions given by their leaders. Again, the minimal level of intra-African trade, despite the fact that the existence of sub-regional economic arrangements such as ECOWAS, SADC, COMESA, has persistently remained below the 5% mark calculated as a fraction of the continent's total external trade

A remarkable development in the post-Cold War world politics is Africa's quest for a United Nations Security Council permanent seat. African leaders requested for two permanent seats in the UN Security Council at the 1991 Harare summit. However, the Ismael Razali led-UN working group on the reform of the UN Security Council in March 1997 recommended one seat each for Africa, Germany and Japan, while Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America are to have one non-permanent seat each (Adeyemo, 2000). Consequently, African states, especially sub-regional and regional powers like Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa with relatively formidable credentials, are in contention for Africa's slot in the Security Council.

Pertinently, the Security Council is the second principal organ of the United Nation Organisation (UNO), which is charged with the primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and

security. It has a total of fifteen members, but in 1945 when the UN was formed, the original membership was eleven. In the Security Council there are five permanent members namely, the US, USSR now Russia, Britain, China and France with the right to veto power. The veto power confers special voting rights on the permanent members, which enable them to prevent a major decision that is not in their interest from being taken. The Security Council is also made up of ten non-permanent members that are elected for a period of two years by the General Assembly. The non-permanent member seats are accordingly distributed to Africa (3), Asia (2), Europe (3) and Latin America (2). Major decisions in the Security Council are taken with the votes of 2/3 majority of members, which must include the votes of all the five permanent members. The privilege enjoyed by the five permanent members that has led to the criticism of the Security Council as undemocratic and that it does not represent the interest of the continents in the world body that necessitated the reform in the UN.

The boundaries of African regional system also changed significantly in the southern edge as a result of the sub-systemic transformation of the minority Apartheid regime in South Africa in 1994 and its subsequent incorporation to the OAU. This development facilitated the integration process of Africa and broadens the scope of African regional system, by the addition of new actors and new capabilities to the regime and new roles. It however does not alter Africa's regional balance of power in the post-Cold War. African regional system is characterized by limited military capabilities, lack of ability to purchase manufactured arms and absence of regional wars. These features tend to isolate the power configuration in the African regional system from its world counterpart. The point to make here however is that post-Cold War changes have reduced the overall capabilities of the African system and partly changed the

regional balance of power as far as the incorporation of South Africa to the African system is concerned (Mulikila, 2002: 29-30).

Furthermore, the post-Cold War period ushered in a new era of liberalism; multiparty democracy, human rights, good-governance, transparency and accountability. Perestroika and glasnost in the former USSR have generated a democracy revolution in the one party states of Eastern Europe (Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary etc) and the USSR with catastrophic consequences of disintegration. The general pull toward multiparty democracy in Africa was able to uproot one party rule or one party dictatorship and military rule in the continent. In countries such as Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique, Benin, DRC (formally Zaire), Gabon, Togo, Somalia, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Nigeria just to mention but a few, saw the opening up of the political space and the enthronement of democracy. The movement for multiparty democracy became a universal phenomenon, which Africa could not ignore in the post-Cold War years.

In consonant with changes that are occurring in the post-Cold War world, the political landscape in Africa is changing with new leaders, debates, issues, constituencies and ideological platforms, to impact on the character and direction of politics. Again, Africa is embracing a new culture of democracy; as open debate, criticism, negotiation, compromise and peaceful resolution of conflict, which portends a bright future for democracy in the continent. The era has also witnessed the proliferation of non-governmental organisations, pro-democracy movements and political parties. Civil society in Africa, which was "demoralized and suffocated" (Mbaku and Ihonvbere, 2009: 524) in the Cold War period, re-emerged in the post Cold War era, to play the role of a check on government. In effect, civil society groups such as labour unions, student groups, pro-democracy groups, new political parties, advocacy groups for women, children, environment, human rights and many others outside the government seeks to ensure that the gains already recorded are not

thrown away by political opportunists. Furthermore, civil society groups are making claims that are directed at avoiding incumbents in government from subverting the democratic process to denying their people, the benefits or dividends of democracy and good governance. Today, the greatest challenge for Africa is how to reconstruct society to meet the needs, aspirations and interests of the African people.

However, much credit for the enthronement of democracy in Africa, though, goes to the pro-democracy forces in individual countries, but the international community also played commendable role. In fact donor agencies, international financial institutions, (the IMF and the World Bank), western nations (the US, Britain, France, Canada, etc), international organisations (the UN, the European Union, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the Commonwealth, the Organisation of American States etc) and international non-governmental organizations (the Catholic Church, Friedrich Ebert Foundation), all of which advocates democracy as an entitlement that all states are obliged to protect, began to antagonize countries that were under one party rule or military dictatorship in Africa. Political liberalization became a precondition for further interaction among the comity of civilized nations (Mbaku and Ihonvbere, 2009: 524; Soremekun, 2004: 417-429).

The gains for the enthronement of democracy in Africa is greeted with much optimism, which is not misplaced after all, but it is only without a cautious pessimism. Apart from the fact that it can be subverted, the continent is immersed in numerous conflicts. This is suggestive of the fact that:

> *After raising hopes of a major political renewal, Africa's "second wave" of democratization seems to be running out of steam. Afro-pessimism is again in fashion and many feel that the emergent trends are better captured by*

> the incessant   wars in Liberia, Somalia, and Burundi than by the few
> success stories represented by South Africa, Botswana and Benin

The post-Cold War period also configured a new global security arrangement, which left the US as the only superpower strategically with allies in the NATO as the dominant security institution in the world. The manifestation of this change was seen from without contention from any rival military power, the US led Allied Forces defeat of the Iraq military in the Gulf War in 1990, the enlargement of the NATO to cover Eastern Europe after 1994, the US continue to act as referee and player in disputes between Israel and Palestinians, South Korea and North Korea and in other troubled spots around the world. The end of the Cold War averted military rivalry, conflict and competition, but the most tragic case of post Cold War conflict in Europe took place in the former Yugoslavia, which unfolded with great speed and intensity, exerting a great price in lives lost, people displaced and property destroyed (Akinrinade and Sesay, 1997; Cox, 1999: 132; Oyebade and Alao 1997). It took the intervention of the US, NATO and the UN, after initial unwillingness for five years, before the conflict in the former Yugoslavia was brought to an end and by which time the world has experienced a devastating genocide in Bosnia (Cox, 1999: 132).

Post-Cold War conflict in Africa, on the other hand, does not attract such timely intervention. This is because the great powers increasing ignored conflicts that did not directly and substantially affect their national interest (Ebo, 1994:93; Ebo, 2002: 41-52). Post - Cold War Africa continued to be faced with inter-state as well as intra-state conflicts. Inter-state conflict relating to incessant border conflict, which are mostly long-standing disputes inherited from the cold world, occurred between Ethiopia and Somali, Somalia and Kenya, Mali and Bokina Faso. Inter-state conflicts were minimal compared to intra-state conflicts in Africa. Intra-state conflicts, which

come in the form of protest, coups, counter coups, civil wars and rebellion with resultant collapse of state institutions in countries such as Sudan, DRC, Somali, Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea etc. The failure of the UN and Western powers to intervene timely led to the genocide in Rwanda and protracted conflicts in troubled African states. This led to the talks of an African intervention force (Echezona, 1998: 54). It was the absence of timely intervention coupled with the need to ensure peace and security in the West African sub-region and an emerging context for world politics that the Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS) formed the ECOMOG to intervene in conflicts in the West African sub-region, e.g. the Liberian conflict in 1990 and subsequently in Sierra Leone and Guinea.

Intra-state conflicts left devastating effects on a world that was expecting peace dividends after the Cold War. Such conflicts created different forms of political emergencies; costly humanitarian crises, delicate peace keeping exercises and threat to international peace and security, especially in the way the wars are supported by the global trade in illegal arms (Alao, 2002: 19). This confirms Adam D. Rotfeld's statement that:

> *Today the international environment is far more complex than it was in the Cold War era of bipolarity. The radically diminished threat of a world war has been replaced by the reality of intra-state conflicts, which undermine stability security at the domestic and regional levels. A serious challenge for the international system is the increasing number of weak or even failed states and their inability to control developments on their own territory (1998: 10).*

Post-Cold War conflict in Africa is characterized by their spillover effect on neighbouring states. For instance, in the Great Lake Region countries such as DRC, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola etc

have all experienced violent intra-state conflict of various forms and degrees. In West Africa, the conflict in Liberia also spread to Sierra Leone and Guinea. Another is the high number of refugees in the continent. The use of child soldiers became another phenomenon to behold in post-Cold War African conflicts. These conflicts have seriously undermined the capacity of African states to ensure long-term stability and peace for their people. Africa has also lost her bargaining power as were in the bipolar world. With diminished external intervention by powerful nations, warring factions plunder resources in areas under their control to sustain conflicts in the continent. This has led to the characterization of several post-Cold War intra-state conflicts in Africa such as Angola, Sudan, DRC, Liberia and Sierra Leone as resource wars, rebellion and insurgency (Reno, 1993:45; Keen, 2003; 67; Ellis, 1998: 157; Albert, 2002: 23).

Consequently, the issue of Africa's marginalization in post-Cold War world politics was pursued by Adebayo Adedeji thus:

> *Countries in sub-Saharan Africa with those of South Asia constitute the periphery of the periphery. Measured by the prevalence of poverty - both an expression of and a force towards marginalization - sub-Sahara Africa is the world's most marginalized region. Africa has for all practical purposes been dropped from world affairs. The media only covers it when the news is bad. There is no doubt that for much of the world, Africa has become a basket case, a permanent mezzogiorno for which there is little if any hope. The world's view of Africa is one of perennial famine, recurrent economic crisis, dictatorship, blatant violation of human rights, and gross carnage wreaked by merciless warlords. Africa is perceived as a region where pro-democracy movement sweeping other parts of the world has been aborted and subverted. Indeed, the past three years have witnessed oscillations between tumult and paralysis in the democratic process; the very Africa leaders who have proclaimed their commitment to its realization have masterminded its subversion (1993:31993:3).*

Conclusion

This paper examined Africa in post-cold world politics. It commenced with an introduction, which raised observations on the idea of Africa as a monolithic entity in world affair, but suggested its relevance hinges on the fact that, it is a system level analysis, which adopts a top bottom approach to the study of world politics. Then the Cold War was conceptualized, to mean a defining stage of world history, which was characterized by the construction of structures of ideological and strategic rivalry and competition between communism and capitalism. The Cold War era was also a bipolar world in which the world was divided into two poles with the defunct USSR and the US at the top of each bloc. This form of arrangement portends a peculiar form of alignment, which subjected the people, and nations of the world.

Thereafter, the paper analyzed African in post-Cold War world politics and suggested that Africa suffers marginalization. This is because dominant international actors like powerful nations (US, Britain, France), international organizations (the UN, the Commonwealth etc), International Financial Institutions (The IMF and the World Bank) do not consider African as a priority entity in world affairs. Despite its relative unimportance, Africa is coming under more constraints to follow values and beliefs of dominant international actors in the post-Cold War world politics. The adoption of these global values and beliefs has far reaching consequences on Africa, positive and negative.

Understandably, cooperation and competition are features of world politics, but Africa can neither cooperate nor compete favourably with other international actors because it lacks the power to do so. Similarly, world politics will continue to be defined by

permanent national interest, and the relative power of actors. Since most powerful nations are not likely to bother themselves with issues that do not have grievous consequence on their national interests, we, therefore, suggest that, in addition to collective action, African States should individually redefine and redirect their national interests with a view to enhancing their national power. This way they will become a major force in the power equation of world politics. Otherwise, Africa will continue to remain at the margin of world affairs.

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