

# **The Heirs of Nkrumah: Africa's New Investments**

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## **Introduction**

**A**T the time of the creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, Ghana's founding President, Kwame Nkrumah, was in a minority of one in calling for the establishment of an African High Command. The idea was to establish a supranational standing army involving all independent African states pooling their resources to advance the liberation of the continent and to protect Africa from the foreign intervention of the sort that was at the time threatening to unravel the former Belgian Congo. Newly-independent African leaders distrusted Nkrumah's intentions, and some placed more faith in defence agreements with external powers, most notably France. The majority of the OAU's leaders sought instead to freeze the colonially-inherited map of Africa, stressing the inviolability of borders and seeking to entrench their own positions behind the shield of sovereignty.

The OAU charter was a clear defeat for Nkrumah's pan-continental, interventionist vision. Four of the organization's seven core principles emphasised sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of member states. Africa's independence movements were largely successful in asserting their sovereignty against western colonial rule, which was itself the most pernicious and debilitating form of intervention. Western military intervention and the weakness of African armies had led to the subjugation of the continent's people and made Africa's new leaders wary of any form of interventions across sovereign borders. African leaders were often paranoid about their own personal survival, even inserting a clause in the OAU charter condemning political assassinations and rejecting a clause binding them to ensuring "good government".

While Nkrumah called for military intervention to liberate Africa from internal colonisers and external interlopers, he also harboured dissidents from neighbouring states whose leaders he accused of being agents of imperialism. The Ghanaian President's paradoxical preaching of African unity while undertaking interventionist measures can be seen in the later actions of some of Africa's new interventionists like Muammar Qaddafi, Yoweri Museveni, Paul Kagame, Charles Taylor and Blaise Compaoré, which often violate the non-intervention and territorial integrity clauses of the OAU charter. Most of these leaders came to power through armed struggles and have backed a similar approach in their foreign policies.

This essay traces the theory and practice of intervention in post-independence Africa. Focusing on the post-Cold War era, we will examine cases of military interventions undertaken by members of three of Africa's regional organizations – the OAU, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) – in Rwanda, Burundi, Comoros, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). As in other parts of the world, interventions in Africa have tended to be motivated by strategic interests, security concerns, and humanitarian considerations. Some actors like Nigeria and South Africa have been accused of pursuing hegemonic ambitions through military interventions. The leaders of several states like Liberia, Uganda, and Rwanda have been charged with using interventions to pursue their own parochial economic agendas. Even when strategic and economic motives are present, security concerns are often a major factor in spurring these interventions. Genuine fears of refugees, rebels, and arms crossing porous borders to destabilise neighbouring states are very real in places like Sierra Leone and Congo. Humanitarian considerations of saving lives and rescuing citizens (or ethnic kinsmen) in distress has also been a factor behind interventions in Liberia and DRC.

Ali Mazrui, one of Africa's foremost theoreticians on intervention, declared in 1967 that: "*Pax Africana* asserts that the peace of Africa is to be assured by the exertions of Africans themselves". Mazrui's idea of "continental jurisdiction" sought to legitimise the slogan of "African solutions to African problems", as newly independent states in Africa attempted to keep the continent free of the military interventions of foreign powers in an era of Cold War in which two superpowers fought for control of several African states through local proxies. Mazrui distinguished between foreign interventions which he considered illegitimate, and inter-African interventions which he saw as more legitimate. This was an African "Monroe Doctrine", inspired by the Organisation of American States own regional conflict resolution mechanism in Latin America, and insisting that meddling outsiders leave local actors to resolve their own problems.

The intervention debate in Africa has traditionally been about competing and clashing norms, doctrines and principles. The debate revolved mainly around two poles: should sovereignty or human rights be respected and protected? From the time of the anti-colonial revolution which led to the independence of the majority of African states until the end of the Cold War by the early 1990s, sovereignty and the inviolability of borders were sacrosanct principles among the OAU's members. The dominant doctrine of African politics determined that states should not interfere in each other's domestic affairs, not even where human rights abuses were prevalent. The dominant mode of intervention in Africa was essentially non-intervention. The OAU never

made peace with the idea that it would sometimes have to step in when an African state faced a crisis that threatened to destabilize the entire region.

This caution among OAU leaders should, however, not be taken to mean that there were not attempts to construct instruments for intervention, or even that there were not exceptions to the 'golden rule' of African politics. Two such exceptions were intervention in favor of enhancing the liberation of subjugated peoples, and specifically to liberate African states from the humiliating yoke of white oppression. As Tanzania's founding President, Julius Nyerere, noted: "...overwhelming everything else in Africa is the sense of nationalism, and the determination of all African peoples that the whole of this continent shall be free and relieved from the humiliation of organized white racialism...the commitment to the struggle against minority and colonial rule overrides all other matters".

Several OAU states therefore furnished military bases and material to Africa's liberation movements. The OAU legitimised Cuban military intervention in Angola in 1975 after the extent of apartheid South Africa's own military incursions into the country was discovered, revealing the military impotence of Africa's own armies. There were two other notable exceptions to the non-intervention principle. During the Cold War era, France intervened militarily no fewer than 21 times in its *pre carre* (backyard), propping up or replacing local clients, often with the acquiescence and sometimes open support of its former African colonies. Nyerere exceptionally launched a border war into Uganda which toppled the brutal tyranny of Idi Amin in 1979. Though the OAU's discomfort at the flouting of its core principle of non-interference was evident, Nyerere, one of Africa's most respected statesmen with impeccable anti-colonial credentials, did not defend the intervention only in humanitarian terms, but also in terms of the need to guarantee the security of his own borders after several clashes with Idi Amin's army.

### *Pax Africana* after the Cold War

After the end of the Cold War and with the apparent triumph of liberal democracy, the issue of human rights and democratization became part of the intervention debate. The UN Security Council became more flexible in defining threats to international peace and security to include refugee flows, humanitarian disasters, and even human rights abuses in places like Liberia, Somalia, northern Iraq, and Yugoslavia. Eminent African scholars like Francis Deng argued that "...the logic of the transcendent importance of human rights as a legitimate area of concern for the international community, especially where order has broken down or the state is incapable or unwilling to act responsibly to protect the masses of citizens, would tend to make international inaction indefensible." The once sacrosanct legal principle of the

sovereignty of, and non-interference in, the domestic affairs of states has at least been weakened if not yet abandoned.

The new political game promoted by western donors in Africa was the conditioning of foreign assistance to the promotion of "good governance" involving political and economic liberalisation. The West was announcing an end to the aid-for-allegiance game of the Cold War era that had kept autocratic clients like Mobutu Sese Seko, Samuel Doe and Siad Barre in power. The new interventionism by western states in Africa would now be more political and economic than military. But the pressure of democratic interventionism did not come only from outside the continent. Civil society groups in states like Benin, Niger, and Zambia successfully challenged incumbent regimes to undertake political liberalisation.

Some of the OAU's members also felt compelled to start exerting moral authority to censure putschists and warlords who were fuelling regional instability. The organization began to show signs of flexibility on the previously sacrosanct principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. With the end of the Cold War and the spread of civil conflicts in Africa, the need for a *Pax Africana* assumed a new urgency and the link between autocratic misrule and conflicts started to be more explicitly made. As OAU Secretary-General, Salim Ahmed Salim, put it: "We should talk about the need for accountability of governments and of their national and international responsibilities. In the process, we shall be redefining sovereignty."

The first African UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, argued forcefully for humanitarian intervention in Somalia, Liberia, and Burundi, castigated western powers for focusing disproportionate attention on "rich men's wars" in the Balkans while neglecting Africa's more numerous conflicts, and advocated the use of regional security arrangements to lighten the UN's heavy peacekeeping burden. Boutros-Ghali's Ghanaian successor, Kofi Annan, has proved to be an even more vociferous advocate of humanitarian intervention: "States are now widely understood to be instruments at the service of their peoples, and not vice-versa....Nothing in the UN charter precludes a recognition that there are rights beyond borders". Annan's controversial promotion of humanitarian intervention has met with strong opposition from many African leaders who fear that such interventions can be used to threaten their own power.

More recently, internationally-respected African leaders like South Africa's Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki as well as Nigeria's Olusegun Obasanjo have urged African states to be more willing to intervene in conflict situations. At the OAU summit in Ouagadougou in 1998, Mandela told his fellow leaders: "Africa has a right and a duty to intervene to root out tyranny....we must all accept that we cannot abuse the concept of national sovereignty to deny the rest of the continent the right and duty

to intervene when behind those sovereign boundaries, people are being slaughtered to protect tyranny." At the OAU summit in Algiers in 1999, Mbeki and Obasanjo were instrumental in putting in place punitive measures against unconstitutional changes of government in Africa in a bid to entrench democratic norms of governance. The OAU subsequently barred the military regimes of Côte d'Ivoire and Comoros from attending its summit in Lomé in 2000, as the idea of "sovereignty as responsibility" increasingly took root in African diplomacy.

While Mbeki has openly challenged the notion of one-party dictatorships in Africa and promoted the idea that African governments should derive their legitimacy from the will of the people, Obasanjo has promoted the establishment of Africa's own "Helsinki option" in the form of a Conference for Security, Stability, Development and Co-operation in Africa (CSSDCA). As Obasanjo put it in 1991 at a meeting in Kampala to discuss the CSSDCA: "An urgent aspect of security need is a re-definition of the concept of security and sovereignty...we must ask why does sovereignty seem to confer absolute immunity on any government who (*sic*) commits genocide and monumental crimes..." In a similar vein, Uganda's Yoweri Museveni noted at the same Kamapala meeting: "Sovereignty became a sacred cow and many crimes have been committed in its name....If the European countries can surrender some of their sovereignty for greater development, African states can similarly surrender some of their sovereignty for greater security, both at the intra and interstate levels." These views are revolutionary in the non-interventionist and sovereignty-obsessed context of African diplomacy in the first three decades of independence.

Once the Cold War was over, various African actors started to use different methods to intervene in local conflicts. Some interventions were covert while others were more overt; some were avowedly political and others more strategic in nature. Africa's new interventionism involved balance of power alliances, regional organizations, coalitions of small states, the threat or use of economic sanctions, and the dispatch of eminent elders and special envoys to conflict zones. Mercenaries have also intervened in African conflicts like Sierra Leone and Angola, a practice opposed by the vast majority of African leaders and analysts as lacking legitimacy and being motivated more by commercial profit than humanitarian or security concerns.

United Nations peacekeeping, at first, assumed an overwhelming importance in post-Cold War Africa in a bid to fill the security vacuum created by the departure of external powers. The ubiquitous UN presence exposed the institutional weaknesses of the OAU and subregional organisations in Africa. After the *débâcle* in Somalia in October 1993 with the killing of 18 American soldiers, UN peacekeepers were forced to withdraw from the Horn of Africa. Since then, the UN Security Council has shown great reluctance to sanction interventions in Africa, turning down requests for missions to Burundi, Congo-Brazzaville and Liberia. The Security Council

shamefully failed to act in the clear case of genocide against 800,000 people in Rwanda between April and June 1994. With the departure of the UN from Africa, weak regional organisations, set up primarily to promote economic integration, as well as *ad hoc* coalitions of local actors, were forced to attempt to fill this void. The ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) intervened in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau; Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda agreed to send troops to Burundi before a coup stalled the idea in July 1996; Burkina Faso, Chad, Gabon, Mali, Senegal, and Togo dispatched troops to the Central African Republic in January 1997 which came under a UN umbrella in 1998; military forces from Angola and the DRC helped Denis Sassou-Nguesso topple his elected rival Pascal Lissouba in Congo-Brazzaville in October 1997; and South Africa and Botswana intervened militarily in Lesotho in September 1998.

### The OAU's New Interventionists

In the first three decades of its existence, the OAU charter's territorial status quo provision was paramount. This was facilitated by the imperatives of the Cold War. The OAU's Commission on Mediation, Arbitration and Reconciliation was moribund for much of its existence. During civil wars in Nigeria, Sudan, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, and Uganda, the reflexive reaction of OAU states was to fall back on its mantra of the respect for its member's territorial integrity, which often meant backing incumbent regimes. The OAU's pioneering 4,800-strong peacekeeping mission in Chad between 1981 and 1982, consisting of troops from Nigeria, Zaire and Senegal, was marred by logistical and financial difficulties as well as a lack of cooperation from the internal parties. The peacekeepers were forced to withdraw ignominiously without achieving any of their goals. In post-Cold War Africa, the OAU has left large-scale peacekeeping and peace enforcement missions to the UN and subregional groups like ECOWAS and SADC.

The OAU's Authority of Heads of State has maintained its support for Africa's territorial status quo but relaxed its strict adherence to the principle of non-interference, though it still deploys diplomatic envoys and military and electoral observers to member states with the strict agreement of recognized regimes. At its 1993 summit in Cairo, the OAU established a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution which stressed the prevention of conflicts rather than peacekeeping, and sought to develop military and political instruments like the 16-member OAU Central Organ and its Conflict Management Centre to improve the OAU's military effectiveness and provide better political analysis of conflict situations. In contrast to past practices, the OAU has deployed electoral observers to 40 countries as well as military observers to Rwanda, Burundi and Comoros with decidedly mixed results. We next briefly examine these three cases of military intervention by the OAU.

## *Rwanda*

The OAU deployed a Military Observer Team (MOT) with soldiers from Burundi, Uganda and Zaire to Rwanda in April 1991. The observers became embroiled in perceptions of vested political interests. In late 1991, the team was replaced by 40 military observers from Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Zimbabwe who constituted the Neutral Military Observer Group (NMOG). The force remained in Rwanda until July 1992. Despite its modest size, the OAU still had problems financing NMOG and needed external assistance. In June 1998, the OAU was owed \$48 million by its member states and only 20 of 53 members were keeping their accounts current. NMOG II, consisting of 132 military observers from Congo-Brazzaville, Nigeria, Senegal and Tunisia, replaced the first NMOG force until November 1993 when this mission was itself subsumed into the UN force in Rwanda (UNAMIR). The OAU's observers helped to maintain stability in Rwanda not so much through their physical presence, but through the OAU's moral force and legitimacy. This gave its diplomats some breathing space to negotiate the Arusha peace agreement of August 1993, the implementation of which was cut short by the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

## *Burundi*

The 67-strong OAU Observer mission in Burundi (OMIB) consisting of soldiers from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Tunisia cost \$300,000 a month, and deployed between February and October 1994. Mandated to promote confidence-building among Burundi's internal parties, the observers faced strong objections from the country's Tutsi-dominated military. OMIB's military observers were withdrawn from Burundi following Pierre Buyoya's military coup in July 1996. Elder statesmen such as the late Julius Nyerere and Nelson Mandela tried to negotiate an end to Burundi's conflict which has resulted in 200,000 deaths since 1993. Mandela's mediation efforts are continuing but have not yet borne fruit. In both Burundi and Rwanda, the OAU faced difficult security conditions with scant military and financial resources. In one case the UN was compelled to take over the force, in the other its peacekeepers were prematurely withdrawn.

## *Comoros*

The third OAU military intervention in post-Cold War Africa was the deployment of an Observer mission to the Comoros islands (OMIC) in August 1997.OMIC was mandated to monitor the security situation and build confidence among the parties after the island of Anjouan sought secession from Comoros. The OAU dispatched 20 military observers from Egypt, Niger, Senegal and Tunisia, but the secessionists in Anjouan refused to allow the deployment of seven OAU observers to their territory. Despite the holding of a pro-independence referendum in Anjouan in October 1997,

the OAU insisted on the territorial integrity of Comoros and urged Anjouan's separatists to accept greater political autonomy and a rotating presidency. The OAU's reflexive support for the territorial status quo of the Comoran archipelago, even in the face of evidence of popular support for independence, demonstrated the continuing strength of the commitment of its members to the inviolability of Africa's colonially-inherited borders. Following a military coup in Anjouan in April 1999 and further violence, the OAU withdrew its military observers from Comoros.

## West Africa's New Interventionists

This section examines the two Nigerian-led ECOMOG interventions in civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and refers briefly to the smaller subregional intervention in Guinea-Bissau. We analyse the rationale, legality and legitimacy of these interventions, and the subregional divisions that resulted from them.

### *Liberia*

The ECOWAS Standing Mediation Committee (SMC) met in Banjul in August 1990 to discuss the deteriorating Liberian civil war which had erupted seven months earlier. Of the sixteen ECOWAS members, only five (Gambia, Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, and Sierra Leone) were present. The meeting established an Economic Community of West African States Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) with military peacekeepers from Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, Sierra Leone and, by 1991, Mali. The force was mandated to supervise a cease-fire and establish an interim government to organise elections after twelve months.

The main rationale for the ECOMOG intervention included: limiting the deleterious effects of Liberia's war on subregional stability, protecting ECOWAS nationals, and relieving humanitarian suffering in Liberia. The seven-year war ultimately drove 750,000 refugees into neighbouring Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, and Sierra Leone, triggered a decade-long war in Sierra Leone, spilling over sporadically into Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. At the start of the war, about 3,000 Nigerian, Ghanaian and Sierra Leonean citizens were being held hostage by Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), and Liberia's war would eventually account for 200,000 mostly civilian deaths.

Several ECOWAS states involved in the intervention had concrete interests in the stability of Liberia. Among Taylor's NPFL were individuals who had been involved in the unsuccessful Gambian coup in 1981. The coup had been strongly backed by Libya which had provided arms and training facilities to the NPFL, as well as to its Revolutionary United Front (RUF) allies in Sierra Leone. Guinea and Sierra Leone were directly affected by the flow of Liberian refugees, while Guinea had 30,000



citizens trapped in Liberia. Sierra Leone had similar reasons as Gambia to be concerned about Liberia, since the NPFL had Sierra Leonean dissidents within its ranks who were vowing to destabilise its country. These fears later proved to be well founded as the Liberian conflict triggered a civil war in Sierra Leone in 1991.

Despite these strong security and humanitarian justifications, francophone Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Senegal were opposed to what they regarded as a usurpation of the ECOWAS Authority's powers by the Standing Mediation Committee. The two francophone members of the SMC, Mali and Togo, declined to contribute troops to ECOMOG. The traditional francophone/anglophone divisions within ECOWAS and traditional fears of Nigeria's hegemonic ambitions were revived by the ECOMOG intervention in Liberia.

The Burkinabè leader, Blaise Compaoré, was the most vociferous opponent of ECOMOG, arguing that the SMC could only intervene in interstate conflicts and not in civil wars. But despite his strong legal arguments, Compaoré's own military interventionism exposed him to charges of hypocrisy. First, Burkina Faso was suspected of sheltering Gambian dissidents determined to destabilise the regime in Banjul. Second, Compaoré was the strongest backer of NPFL rebels in Liberia and also supported RUF rebels in Sierra Leone. There are credible reports that he sent troops and arms to both countries, provided camps for military training to both rebel groups, and benefitted from illicit mineral and other exports from both countries. In Angola, Compaoré has been accused, in a UN report, of backing UNITA rebels.

Nonetheless, the arguments used in establishing ECOMOG had a more solid basis in politics than in law, and ECOMOG was justified largely on humanitarian and regional stability grounds. The ECOMOG intervention in Liberia did not conform to the constitutional legal requirements of ECOWAS. Neither the 1978 ECOWAS Protocol on Non-Aggression nor its 1981 Protocol relating to Mutual Assistance on Defence provided clear legal justification for the intervention. The 1978 Protocol commits members to settling disputes peacefully, refraining from supporting subversion or aggression, and pledging to refer disputes to a Committee of the ECOWAS Authority. The 1981 Protocol permitted intervention in subregional conflicts only in cases of: an externally-directed threat, a conflict between two ECOWAS states, or an externally-sustained internal conflict. By the time of ECOMOG's intervention in Liberia, the 1981 Protocol had not yet been ratified by some members due, in part, to fears about Nigeria's preponderant weight in the military structure. Mali and Cape Verde had refused to sign, while Benin, Gambia and Mauritania had not yet ratified it.

Even the body that took the decision to establish ECOMOG was on shaky legal foundations. The Standing Mediation Committee was intended, as its name suggests, only to *mediate* rather than attempt to impose solutions on conflicts. Article 4 of the

document establishing the SMC talks only of "mediation procedures" and nowhere is military action referred to. Taylor's NPFL also did not give its consent to ECOMOG's intervention in Liberia. Only after several subregional peace conferences did the full ECOWAS membership recognise ECOMOG's role in Liberia, though Burkina Faso and to a lesser degree, Côte d'Ivoire, continued to provide military assistance to the NPFL.

But despite ECOMOG's questionable *legality*, the intervention was provided *legitimacy* by important organizations and governments. Most western governments backed ECOMOG as a worthy effort by Africans to solve their own problems, though they desisted from providing its peacekeepers with strong logistical support until 1996. OAU Secretary-General, Salim Ahmed Salim, brushed aside legal arguments against ECOMOG, saying: "...to argue that there was no legal base for any intervention in Liberia is surprising. Should the countries in West Africa...just leave the Liberians to fight each other? Will that be more legitimate?" The OAU Chairman in 1990, Ugandan leader, Yoweri Museveni, also supported the pro-ECOMOG camp, voicing arguments he had used for Ethiopia and Sudan to support external involvement in cases of massive refugee flows to neighbouring countries. The UN at first lent more cautious support to ECOMOG, but by 1993, the world body had sent 368 unarmed military observers to Liberia before taking the lead in negotiating the Cotonou peace accord in 1993.

### *Sierra Leone*

The war in Liberia spilled over into Sierra Leone in March 1991 as a result of the NPFL sponsoring a military invasion by RUF rebels. Charles Taylor had earlier promised Sierra Leone that it would "taste war" for supporting ECOMOG in Liberia. Nigerian, Ghanaian and Guinean troops were sent to Freetown as part of efforts to protect Sierra Leone's capital from RUF rebels. The West African soldiers were in Sierra Leone under bilateral military agreements signed with successive governments in Freetown. On 25 May 1997, a military coup toppled the elected government of Ahmed Tejjan Kabbah, and the West African forces were expelled to the outskirts of Freetown. Kabbah fled to Conakry, and asked ECOMOG, which was concluding its successful mission in Liberia, to restore him to power. This request, the existence of bilateral military treaties with an elected government, and the fact that the international community continued to accord diplomatic recognition to Kabbah and refused to recognise the military junta, provided greater legal justification for ECOMOG's intervention to restore Kabbah to power than its earlier intervention in Liberia.

After the 1997 coup, ECOWAS called for a return to constitutional rule and imposed a blockade on the putschists who enjoyed little popular support. The coup leader,

Major Johnny Paul Koromah, at first agreed to an ECOWAS decision to reinstate Kabbah to power by 22 April 1998, but then talked about staying in power until 2001. After several clashes with Koromah's forces, Nigerian troops restored Kabbah to power in March 1998, with strong backing from the OAU. Compaoré again publicly questioned Nigeria's motives, asking "just what might be the intentions of those who have employed force for the restoration of President Kabbah". Senegal's *Sud-Quotidien* newspaper criticised Nigeria's "eternal quest for leadership" and its "opportunism" in transforming the departing ECOMOG force in Liberia into another ECOMOG force in Sierra Leone.

But the intervention was not simply a case of an overbearing *Pax Nigeriana*. While some of Nigeria's generals personally benefited from revenues written off as ECOMOG expenses and the mission did bolster Nigeria's self-image as a subregional power, the operation also helped an isolated Nigerian leader, General Sani Abacha, to ward off the threat of severe international sanctions against his regime. When Olusegun Obasanjo was elected in February 1999, he withdrew most of Nigeria's soldiers from Sierra Leone, forcing the UN to subsume the remaining 3,500 Nigerian soldiers into UNAMSIL, a more international peacekeeping force.

Several ECOWAS states, particularly Guinea and Liberia, which shared common borders with Sierra Leone, had far more of an interest in the stability of Sierra Leone than Nigeria. Even Charles Taylor, who had been fuelling the war in Sierra Leone by backing the RUF, hosted over 120,000 Sierra Leonean refugees. Liberia suffered two military incursions from Guinea between 1999 and 2000. Two military incursions were also launched into Guinea from Liberia and Sierra Leone in September 2000. Both Taylor and Guinean leader, Lansana Conté, appear to be sponsoring rebellions against each other and are proving to be among West Africa's most prominent interventionists, rendering the Mano river basin one of the most unstable regions in the world.

Côte d'Ivoire also had a strong interest in subregional stability; it still hosted about 200,000 refugees from the Liberian civil war. Senegal, a consistent critic of the Nigerian role in Sierra Leone, became the most enthusiastic supporter of a Nigerian presence in the ECOMOG mission in Guinea-Bissau in 1998, after Senegal had launched its own brief military intervention into Bissau, with Guinea, amidst concerns of arms trafficking to secessionists in Senegal's Casamance region. This force was later replaced by an ECOMOG force involving Benin, Gambia, Niger and Togo, which had to be withdrawn in May 1999 partly as a result of its inability, due to financial and military weaknesses, to deal with continuing instability in Bissau. The force was also withdrawn because of a change in the political situation following the ousting of President Joao Vieira by his chief of staff, General Ansumane Mane.

## Southern Africa's New Interventionists

### *The Democratic Republic of Congo*

In September 1996, a massive rebellion of Banyamulenge Tutsis in eastern Zaire threatened to end the three-decade autocracy of Mobutu Sese Seko. The rebellion escalated, and Mobutu accused Rwanda and Burundi of provoking the conflict, and of harbouring, training and arming the Banyamulenge. By the end of 1996, Mobutu imposed military rule over the Kivu province in an attempt to "eliminate all subversive networks in the region". A full-scale war ensued between Mobutu's armed forces and Laurent Kabila's rebel Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL) which was militarily backed by Rwanda, Uganda, Angola, Burundi, as well as Eritrea and Ethiopia. While Rwanda, Uganda, Angola and Burundi had genuine security interests in Zaire, Ethiopia and Eritrea seemed to be lending solidarity to Uganda, with the latter three regimes also backing Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) rebels in Sudan. Facing military defeat with a collapsing army, Mobutu relinquished power in May 1997, ending 32 years of tyrannical misrule.

Kabila declared himself president of the newly rebaptized Democratic Republic of Congo. Scarcely one year after seizing power, armed rebels from the ranks of the ADFL began to turn against Kabila. The Congolese leader's principal backers – Uganda and Rwanda – also turned against him and backed anti-Kabila rebels. In a flagrant violation of international norms and principles, Uganda and Rwanda sent their armies into Congo. These interventions have since triggered a spate of other interventions. This situation, like that in Liberia and Sierra Leone, has been characterised by numerous shaky and unstable alliances involving regional actors and local factions. Three SADC members (Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia) sent troops to support Kabila's regime at his request, with Zimbabwean leader, Robert Mugabe, justifying the intervention on the basis of his chairmanship of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defense and Security. Mugabe further justified the intervention on the basis of the 1997 Harare Declaration by which OAU leaders agreed to oppose unconstitutional changes of governments.

These interventions and counter-interventions have been highly destabilizing for the Great Lakes and Southern African regions. Regional states like South Africa, Zambia, Botswana and Tanzania have sought to manage the DRC conflict through diplomatic rather than military means. But South Africa's neutrality has been questioned by other states due to its past role in supplying arms to Rwanda and Uganda. Encouraged by Zimbabwe, Kabila has openly defied South Africa's mediation efforts and supported Mugabe's policy of seeking to isolate Pretoria diplomatically.

Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola accused South Africa of a double standard in intervening militarily in Lesotho in 1998 while refusing to do the same in the Congo. As an example of how the war in the Congo has been based on shaky and shifting alliances, relations between two former allies, Uganda's Museveni and Rwanda's Kagame, had drastically soured by June 2000. Kagame accused Museveni of trying to dictate to the Rwandese how they should conduct their internal affairs, and, in the DRC, both countries became embroiled in the struggle for Kisangani's rich deposits of diamonds and gold resulting in two military clashes between their armies.

### *Lesotho*

Southern African states have undertaken less destructive and divisive interventions than the one in the DRC. Following King Letsie's "royal coup" in 1994, for example, the South African government worked with Zimbabwe and Botswana to settle the constitutional crisis in Lesotho by returning the elected government of Ntsu Mokhehle to power and reinstating King Moshoeshoe II to his throne. Lesotho has a history of political conflicts that have revolved around questions of resource distribution, political participation and legitimacy. A new crisis was triggered in Lesotho after the split of the ruling Basotholand Congress Party (BCP) in 1997.

After a disputed election in May 1998, opposition forces threatened to make the country "ungovernable". SADC established a commission to investigate claims by the opposition parties that the election had been rigged. The commission's findings, released on 17 August 1998, were inconclusive on the issue of the legitimacy of the disputed election. Immediately after the release of the report, violence erupted in Lesotho with lower-ranking members of the army staging a mutiny in which they took over the national radio station. South Africa and Botswana sent troops to Lesotho in September 1998 in a bid to restore order. This intervention was justified on the basis of the need to maintain SADC's principle of opposing unconstitutional changes of regime and to maintain subregional stability.

In assessing the justifications for the military intervention in Lesotho, four important points need to be emphasized. First, at a meeting of SADC Ministers of Defense in Gaborone in September 1998, South Africa and Botswana, along with Zimbabwe and Mozambique, were requested to intervene in Lesotho under the auspices of SADC, but Zimbabwe and Mozambique declined to send troops. Second, the Lesotho government lacked the capacity for law enforcement and both Lesotho's Prime Minister and King wrote to SADC requesting military assistance. Third, the situation preceding the intervention arguably had the potential to spill over into other states in the subregion and violated SADC's legal principles of unconstitutional changes of government. Finally, although the military intervention was badly executed, leading to the unfortunate loss of civilian lives and destruction of property, it succeeded in its

principal goal of rolling back a *coup d'état* and restoring constitutional order in Lesotho.

### *The Problems of Pax Pretoriana*

Until recently, South Africa was clearly more favorably disposed towards preventive diplomacy than towards peacekeeping and peace enforcement. Over the past six years, the ANC-led government, which inherited a discredited apartheid army, ruled out the military option in subregional conflicts, displaying a much keener interest in brokering peace deals and promoting negotiations along the lines of its own negotiated settlement of 1994. With the 1998 military intervention in Lesotho and its promise to commit troops to the UN's peacekeeping mission in the DRC, however, South Africa has begun to demonstrate a greater willingness to keep peace in its own subregion. Its intervention in Lesotho was, however, not launched out of sheer altruism. It was also motivated by crude self-interest. Pretoria naturally wanted to prevent an implosion of land-locked Lesotho, lodged in the belly of South Africa, and stave off an influx of refugees and arms to its own country. Pretoria was also determined to defend and protect the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, a major source of water supply to South Africa.

South Africa's efforts at promoting democracy and human rights in countries like Nigeria, Lesotho and Zimbabwe have been met with fierce opposition from other African countries. President Thabo Mbeki has desisted from confronting other African governments publicly, preferring instead to seek regional consultations to settle local problems. Pretoria's new consultative strategy was evident in Mbeki's decision to invite his Mozambican and Namibian counterparts to form part of the delegation of regional leaders to engage Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe at Victoria falls in April 2000. This was an effort to prevent conflict in neighbouring Zimbabwe over the so-called "land-grab debate". Mbeki's "quiet diplomacy", almost universally lambasted by the western press and South Africa's white media, appears to have been vindicated by the successful elections in Zimbabwe in July 2000. But it is clear that South Africa has been forced to be more cautious when dealing with its African counterparts and in attempting to export its democratic model north of the Limpopo.

### Conclusion

Two post-colonial taboos have been broken in post-Cold War Africa: the inviolability of colonially-inherited borders and the secession of a group from a state through armed struggle. The first principle was undermined by military interventions in Lesotho, Liberia, Congo-Brazzaville and Congo-Kinshasa, while the second principle was successfully breached by the creation of Eritrea from Ethiopia in April 1993 following thirty years of war. In post-Cold War Africa, military interventions are

likely to be launched primarily by subregional organisations like ECOWAS and SADC, involving local hegemons like South Africa and Nigeria.

At its summit in Abuja in October 1998, ECOWAS agreed to establish a standby ECOMOG peacekeeping force as part of its Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution and Peacekeeping for Regional Security. Political and military institutions are being established to undertake preventive diplomacy, take decisions on military interventions, and to implement such decisions. Criteria for future interventions have been clearly spelt out to include humanitarian and security considerations in a bid to avoid the political divisions and legal wranglings over the ECOMOG interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone. But concerns have been expressed by Africa's civil society groups regarding subregional security mechanisms becoming instruments for regional leaders to protect the regimes of their personal allies.

SADC's Organ for Politics, Defense and Security was created in Gaborone in June 1996 to foster security cooperation and manage subregional conflicts. The organ is currently marred in the divisive politics of the Congo intervention. South Africa still insists that the Organ should be headed by the state in the rotating SADC chair and that the troika of the past, present and future chairs should also play important oversight and monitoring roles. In a further effort to break the political impasse over SADC's security Organ, Pretoria has floated the idea of expanding a 1998 Mutual Defence Pact between Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia and the DRC into a broader and all-inclusive Southern African defence pact. In Africa's regional conflicts, a major challenge remains how to transform alliances formed for war into alliances of peace.

The seven cases of military interventions examined in this essay reveal that countries most directly affected by refugee flows and other forms of instability resulting from conflicts tend to be more inclined to act swiftly in these situations. One million Somali refugees flowed into Kenya and Ethiopia; 750,000 Liberian refugees spilled into Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone; 500,000 Sierra Leonean refugees entered Guinea and Liberia; and Rwanda's genocide drove 250,000 refugees into Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, and Zaire within twenty-four hours. Most interventions by regional states in Africa have to be understood in light of the instability that such population flows pose to neighbouring states, in a region where long, porous borders have often facilitated the establishment of transborder diasporas transferring arms or recruiting rebels. Subregional actors in Africa often have the advantage of understanding the complex dynamics of their subregions better and can focus more attention on them than the OAU or the UN which have many agendas. But, as the Liberia and Lesotho interventions reveal, there are also clear disadvantages to interventions by subregional actors, including suspicions of negative hegemonic ambitions and the pursuit of

parochial and self-interested economic goals which often exacerbate rather than alleviate regional conflicts.

In Liberia, Lesotho, Sierra Leone and Rwanda, regional peacekeepers were viewed with suspicion and perceived to be pursuing parochial agendas. This at least suggests diluting the strength of regional hegemons like Nigeria and South Africa whose presence may be essential for providing the military backbone of peacekeeping missions, but whose dominant presence in such missions may also cause political splits and exacerbate military conflicts. In such cases, the use of peacekeepers from outside the subregions at issue, under a UN umbrella, appears to be a sensible approach. The current UN peacekeeping missions in Congo and Sierra Leone, difficult as they have been, could signify a new, innovative approach to peacekeeping in Africa based on regional pillars supported by local hegemons whose political dominance is diluted by multinational peacekeepers from outside their regions. By placing largely regional forces under the UN flag, the hope is that the peacekeepers will enjoy the legitimacy and impartiality that the UN's universal membership often provides, while some of the financial and logistical problems of regional peacekeepers can be alleviated through greater burden-sharing.

The subsuming under the UN of OAU peacekeepers in Rwanda, of ECOMOG forces in Sierra Leone, and of the inter-African force in Central African Republic, coupled with the premature withdrawal of OAU peacekeepers from Burundi and Comoros, and ECOMOG peacekeepers from Guinea-Bissau, all reveal the continuing weakness of regional interventions in Africa. Only in Liberia and the Central African Republic do regional peacekeepers appear to have restored some semblance of order, and then only with the assistance of external logistical and financial support. The proposed peacekeeping force to monitor the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea will largely be run by the UN, with OAU observers playing a supporting role.

Africa's fledgling security organizations have been forced to fill vacuums created by the departure of external actors. The apparent disappearance of the previously ubiquitous French military gendarme is one of the most notable developments in post-Cold War Africa. France's non-military intervention following Côte d'Ivoire's coup of December 1999 was the most dramatic symbol of changing times. Having suffered serious political damage and loss of influence in Rwanda and Zaire, President Jacques Chirac announced that France would no longer intervene militarily in its former colonies. This may still mean that France will try to influence events indirectly through such actions as providing logistical support for African forces in Central African Republic and by reportedly backing the militarily victorious party in Congo-Brazzaville. France still has military bases and troops in Djibouti, Senegal, and Côte d'Ivoire. But its military interventionism now carries serious political costs.



In October 1997, OAU army chiefs of staff called on Africa's five subregions to earmark stand-by brigade-size forces for a pan-continental force. Five months later, the OAU's Council of Ministers called for an African peacekeeping force under the OAU's command and control. Though these suggestions are yet to be implemented and have a long way to go before they can be, they mirror Nkrumah's idea of an African High Command which was so soundly defeated four decades ago. In his day, Nkrumah was derided as a quixotic and ambitious visionary. Today, his political heirs, Africa's new interventionists, seem to be moving closer to the recognition that his African High Command, built around subregional security mechanisms, may yet be an idea whose time has come.

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