African Conflict Management and the New World Order

Edmond J. Keller
University of California, Los Angeles

Policy Paper # 13
May 1995

The author and IGCC are thankful to the United States Institute of Peace for its support of this project. Author's opinions are his own.

CONTENTS

AFRICAN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER

Edmond J. Keller
John C. Coleman Center for African Studies and
University of California, Los Angeles

To assist in the development of an African capacity to more adequately manage domestic conflicts in member states that have become or have the potential to become regionalized or even internationalized, the United States should as a matter of national interest continue to take the lead in providing the resources, technical expertise and political support for the Organization of African Unity, in collaboration with the United Nations, to firmly establish an African conflict prevention and management mechanism.

Summary

With the end of the Cold War, a New World Order is in the process of being formed. Africa has not been immune to the dramatic shifts in the world economic and political order. The end of superpower competition on the continent has had significant implications for African regional security. One of the defining features of the new order is the increased scope and intensity of domestic conflicts that have spilled, or have the potential to spill, over national borders into neighboring states. Conflicts such as those occurring in Somalia, Rwanda, Liberia, and Sudan have attracted the involvement of international and regional actors in the quest for conflict management and prevention. In the process, the notions of state sovereignty and the norms of external intervention in domestic disputes are currently being reconsidered in international and regional fora. It is clear that mechanisms must be developed to allow Africans to address the most severe domestic tensions and conflicts before they become regionalized or internationalized. The United States, through the United Nations, has a special role to play in assisting the OAU to develop such a capacity. As a matter of national interest, the U.S. should take the lead in providing the resources, technical expertise and political support that is necessary for this to happen in a timely fashion.

Edmond J. Keller is a professor of political science and director of the James S. Coleman African Studies Center at the University of California, Los Angeles. This paper resulted in part from "The End of the Cold War and the New African Political Order," a conference co-hosted by the author and Dr. Donald Rothchild, Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Davis, February 7–19, 1994, at UCLA. The conference was supported by grants from IGCC and the United States Institute of Peace.

Introduction

As the decade of the 1980s drew to a close, the world witnessed momentous changes. The Berlin Wall was brought down, and Germany was reunited for the first time since the Second World War. The Polish Solidarity movement had used organized labor in a ten year struggle to topple Polish Communism; and the people of Czechoslovakia had fashioned their own "velvet revolution." Moreover, the entire Soviet Union was shattering. The Cold War had ended, catalyzing a trend toward cooperation rather than competition among former superpower adversaries.

Africa was not immune to dramatic shifts in the world economic and political order. Around the same time that sea changes began to occur in the Eastern Bloc, Africa was embroiled in economic and political crises, Poor governance and bad policy choices over the first three decades of African independence created circumstances that by the end of the 1980s had become unbearable for the citizens of one African country after the other. Pressures for political and economic liberalization, applied by Western democracies such as the United States and France, as well as insistence by multilateral and bilateral aid donors that a commitment to good governance practices on the part of African governments serve as a to economic and technical assistance, bolstered African civil society.

Today, it is generally assumed that we have entered an era in which a new world order is emerging. However, key questions remain: Where does Africa stand as a result of this sea change? Does the end of the Cold War imply that there will be a peace dividend for the world at large, let alone for Africa? Does it mean that large and rich countries like the after United States, Japan, and Germany can now redirect resources formerly used in efforts to counter Soviet influence in Africa toward meeting the global economic challenge? Will Africa be put up for triage and marginalized among the world community of states? How prerequisite should the United States respond to Africa's growing incidents of transnational ethnic conflict?

Background

One of the primary defining features of the "New World Order" is the emergence or resurgence of nationalism among large ethnic groups heretofore incorporated into multi-ethnic states. Not only is this an everyday fact of life in the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia, the countries of Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and Rwanda, to name only a few, have experienced a similar fate. But the important element in contemporary domestic and regional conflicts in Africa is that they have the propensity to become internationalized. The current conflicts in the Horn, Sudan, and Rwanda, for example, have created refugee flows and the flow of armed combatants across national borders, catastrophic famine, and gross violations of human rights. In the process, what were once thought to be mere domestic conflicts, out of the purview of international organizations like the United Nations (UN) and regional organizations like the Organization of African Unity (OAU), have now been internationalized. For example, the United States (U.S.) spearheaded a move by the UN to finally decide on the status of the former Italian colony of Eritrea, which had been embroiled in a thirty-year civil war. The U.S. also took the lead in the UN's effort to bring humanitarian assistance to war-torn and famine-stricken Somalia after that state collapsed in 1990. In addition, over the past five years of so, the UN has been involved in now major peacekeeping operations in Namibia, Mozambique, Angola, and Rwanda; furthermore, it has played smaller observer roles in Chad, Liberia, South Africa and Western Sahara. In these and other African crisis areas, external actors have been drawn into what were technically civil wars in order to restore peace and security. At the same time, there now seems to be a sense both inside and outside of the continent that Africa must develop the capacity to deal with its growing problems of domestic conflicts that may become regionalized.

In the post-colonial era, Africa has generally been viewed by outsiders as an area where external threats were not the problem; therefore, there was no African "security dilemma." Instead, the sources of insecurity in Africa could most often be traced to domestic phenomena. Factors such as drought, famine, and internal wars over the past two decades have often led to human dislocations within African states as well as across their borders. Since 1960, Africa has witnessed more than a score of civil wars, and in just the past decade between 2 and 4 million people have died in such wars. In 1993 alone, there were 5.2 million refugees and 13 million displaced persons in Africa. Domestic insecurity in Africa, then, has had an increasingly high propensity to spill over borders, resulting in new regional security dilemmas. For example, the 1994 civil war in Rwanda resulted in a matter of weeks in five hundred thousand deaths, and in more than 3 million refugees fleeing to Zaire and Tanzania.

It is clear that what were once thought to be mere domestic conflicts are now increasingly seen as potential sources for regional insecurity. In contrast to how it has viewed its role in the past, the UN has accepted that it has a major role to play in averting the regional spread of domestic conflicts throughout

the world, and restoring peace once they nave occurred. Since the end of the cold war the UN has played an increasingly active role in conflict mediation. In 1988, it was involved in "preventive diplomacy" (peacemaking) in 11 cases and had deployed peacekeeping forces in 5 conflicts. In contrast, by 1994 the UN was engaged in mediating 28 separate conflicts and had deployed forces in 17 different countries, increasing the instances of intervention more than three-fold. UN peacekeeping forces were deployed in 17 conflicts, as compared to only 5 in 1988. In budgetary terms, UN spending on peacekeeping operations rose from $230 million in 1988 to $3.6 billion in 1994. In 1994, the U.S. provided 31 of the UN peacekeeping budget, but the Clinton Administration is committed to reducing that figure to around 25, and to providing Africa with the regional capacity to engage in its own effective peacekeeping operations.

Rethinking the Norms of Intervention and State Sovereignty

The Cold War is over, the superpowers are no longer there to step in to support regional client or another; Africa is generally being left to its own devices. The realities of the situation have encouraged African leaders to seriously reconsider the norms of external intervention for the purpose of settling domestic disputes. This in turn, requires a reexamination of the notion of state sovereignty.

The implications of the end of the Cold War and the simultaneous emergence of the New World Order have profound implications not only for Africa, but also for the UN and the major powers who are still expected to intervene in situations that threaten international security. This challenge is also part and parcel of the New African Order. Can the world avert a future Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, or Rwanda? When ethnic and other forms of domestic conflict spill over borders, will Africa have the capacity to restore peace and order? Given the fact that the cold war has ended, what role will there be for external actors such as the U.S., Russia, or France in peacemaking, peacekeeping, and development in the New African Order? Also, in light of contemporary realities, will the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity redefine when and how they become involved in the settlement of severe internal conflicts with international or regional ramifications? Should international actors intervene only when human rights are being violated? Should the norms of intervention be changed, or should the world community continue to look upon domestic disputes as being out of the domain of international and regional actors? The answers to these interrelated questions are now being worked out. There is much discussion in unofficial as well as official circles about what road should be taken in addressing the issues raised here. Traditional modalities for conflict management in Africa are being reexamined and new ones are being proposed.

Clearly, Africa needs to prepare itself play a leading role in resolving not only interstate conflicts among member states, but also cases of severe domestic conflicts that lead to regional insecurity. At the same time, it is obvious that Africa cannot be expected to go the course alone. It will have to have assistance from external actors such as the UN and the major powers.

The United Nations

The UN has historically supported the idea of the inviolability of the national boundaries of African states that existed at the time of independence. Consequently, it has been unwilling to become involved in adjudicating domestic disputes that involve the issues of secession or irredentism. On the other hand, in cases where it was perceived that the right of the people of certain territories to self-determination was being denied, the UN has consistently attempted to engage in diplomatic efforts to secure that right. For example, in the case of Namibia, after years of diversionary tactics and foot-dragging on the part of South Africa, the UN was able to negotiate a ceasefire between the protagonists, to establish a peacekeeping presence in the country, and to organize and supervise multi-party elections that led to Namibian independence in 1990.

After having intervened in the former Belgian Congo to quell domestic conflicts in 1960, the UN came to conceive of its role as being confined to settling interstate conflicts through diplomacy. By the 1990s, with the administration of UN Secretary General Boutrous Boutrous Ghali, this attitude had shifted. The organization began to rethink the notion of state sovereignty, its implications, and the norms of intervention in domestic disputes. In 1991, it decided to intervene in Iraq, to protect the Kurds from the genocidal attacks of Saddam Hussein. This was the first time the UN had chosen to take sides and to define a country's domestic problems as an international security issue.

By the time the UN decided to intervene in the Somali civil war, it was clear that humanitarian considerations had come to take precedence over state sovereignty. Moreover, UN officials now have come to believe that regional actors are going to have to improve their capacity to intervene in the most severe

of domestic conflicts in their regions, albeit with external support.

The Organization of African Unity

Although it was founded to manage conflicts among member states and to represent their interests in international fora, the OAU has historically played more of a reactive role in addressing threats to national and regional security. The OAU Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration is theoretically responsible for settling disputes between member states, but it has historically left that task to various ad hoc commissions, committees of the organization, and eminent persons groups. Moreover, the Commission does not have a mandated role in domestic conflict prevention and resolution. but only in mediating interstate conflicts.

When domestic conflicts threatened to dismember African states, the OAU historically expressed more public concern than the UN; nonetheless, the OAU, like the UN. has historically supported the inviolability of African national boundaries. However, African leaders are increasingly defining domestic conflicts that spill across borders in collective security terms. There has always been an inclination for African states to intervene collectively in some of the more serious conflicts, but there has not always been the capacity. The first major OAU peacekeeping effort of an inter-African force occurred in Chad in 1981-82. However, that intervention was a failure. The operation was underfinanced and plagued by logistical problems. The UN refused to provide the needed sponsorship for the exercise.

The most successful inter-African peacekeeping effort to date has been that mounted by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the ECOWAS Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). After five years of peacekeeping, some semblance of order has been restored, and preparations are now underway for multi-party elections. This precedent-setting regional peacekeeping operation represents a radical departure from past practice, and has met with some limited success.

The Mechanism for Conflict Prevention and Resolution

In 1991 the African Leadership Forum, the OAU, and the UN Economic Commission for Africa jointly sponsored a historic conference m Kampala, Uganda. The final report of the gathering proposed the establishment of the permanent Conference on Security, Stability, Development, and Cooperation (CSSDC). The report also called for the establishment of a continental peacekeeping machinery and for the drastic lowering of military expenditure by African states. The theme was picked up by OAU secretary-general Salim A. Salim, and over the next three years plans were made for the establishment of an "OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention and Resolution." The Mechanism is now in place. All that remains is securing an appropriate level of funding and the operationalization of plans. The primary objective of the Mechanism is said to be the "anticipation and prevention of conflicts." In situations where conflicts have occurred, the Mechanism is supposed to be responsible for undertaking peacemaking and peacebuilding activities. In cases of severe conflict, there is a provision for OAU cooperation with the UN in the development of a peacekeeping strategy.

The Challenge of the New Orders

The establishment of the new Mechanism comes at a time when the UN, as well as bilateral aid donors, are looking to Africa to do more to solve its own problems. For example, in 1994 the U.S. Congress passed the African Conflict Resolution Act, calling for the provision of material and technical assistance to help institutionalize African conflict resolution capabilities. This aid is to be provided to the OAU, subregional organizations, and national governments. Also, it provides for education and training in conflict resolution and peacekeeping for civilian and military personnel, and the strengthening of the mediation and reconciliation capacities of non-governmental organizations in Africa. The projected cost over a four-year period is $60 million.

The question remains: Is Africa ready for new thinking and new norms with regard to issues of state sovereignty and the legitimacy of external intervention in what were heretofore considered essentially to be domestic problems? The Mechanism is an ambitious project that is destined to face enormous difficulties in developing into an effective institution. First, Africa is comprised of 53 of the poorest countries in the world, many of which are characterized by unstable politics and food insecurity. Their militaries are small, and even so they already spend too much for military purposes. How then will they afford to participate in the Mechanism? Who will pay for the training and upkeep of the elite troops a nation must make available to the inter-African peacekeeping force? The second potential pitfall has to do with state sovereignty and the norms of external intervention: Will the OAU secretary-general in fact be able to assert the authority assigned to him when crisis emerges? While African leaders generally agree that the Mechanism is needed, it is unclear what most would do if they were confronted with a situation

where the OAU Mechanism was commanded to intervene to resolve conflicts in their own country. Certainly such intervention would be more likely in smaller and weaker states, or in places where the state has completely collapsed, and least likely in larger and stronger states or where a state is highly unstable but still coherent.

Conclusion

Formidable challenges face the architects of both the New African and New World Order, and the most effective responses will have to be formulated in close consultation. It is in the interest of large and strong states like the U.S. and Russia to help African regional and subregional organizations develop the capacity to manage interstate as well as severe intrastate conflicts. At the end of 1994, it appeared that the U.S. was prepared to take the lead in such a strategy; however, with the installment of the new U.S. Congress, there is a real danger that the U.S. will reconsider whether it has any national interests that mandate the support of regional and sub-regional conflict management activities in Africa. Certain provisions of the House Republican "Contract with America" would impose numerous restrictions on U.S. support for UN and regional peacekeeping programs.

Much of the opposition to U.S. support for peacekeeping efforts of the UN is rooted in the embarrassing deaths of 18 American soldiers in 1993 at the hands of Somali "technicals." Related to this is the sense that the Somalia adventure was a failure because when UN troops finally withdrew in early March 1995, clan warfare continued to rage. What is often ignored is the fact that the humanitarian mission of the UN was hugely successful.

Rather than considering cutting back on UN peacekeeping, U.S. policymakers should recognize that they have a moral obligation to support such programs, especially when they enable the development of regional conflict management capabilities. What successful UN interventions (e. g., the provision of peacekeeping monitors in Chad, Mozambique, Namibia, Cambodia, and elsewhere) imply is that early intervention for preventive diplomacy or monitoring often results in the avoidance of highly destructive conflicts and the need for large-scale intervention. This is made abundantly clear by the catastrophe that Rwanda has become. The UN did not intervene in Rwanda until about a half million people had been killed, and hundreds of thousand Rwandese had been driven as refugees into exile in the neighboring countries of Tanzania and Zaire. Once this conflict got out of hand, the U.S. appeared to be the only country with the capacity to quickly address the humanitarian crisis. It unilaterally sent 2,300 troops on that mission, at a cost of more than $220 million. These resources would have been more wisely spent in support of the development of an African conflict prevention and management capacity.

How to Keep the Peace in Africa

Strengthen the UN's Capacity to Prevent and Manage African Conflict

Because of its preeminent leadership role in the world community, the United States should recognize that since many of Africa's problems are in reality global, this is in keeping with U.S. national interests. Costly humanitarian and peacemaking efforts would be avoided if effective early-warning systems and preventive diplomacy at the regional level were in place.

Provide Resources, Technical Expertise, and Political Support for the OAU

The United States, in collaboration with the United Nations, should take the lead to assist in the development of an African conflict prevention and management mechanism to head off domestic conflicts that have the potential to become regionalized or internationalized.

Increase the United States' Department of Defense Budget Allocation for the Development of an African Conflict Prevention and Management Capacity

The present amount is a token gesture, not a serious commitment.