The Bi-Polar World System and the Contradictions of African Independence: A Retrospective Reflection

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Abstract

The Cold War International system which polarized Europe and other world continents into two hostile camps: the West dominated by the United States and the East by the Soviet Union after 1945 had profound implications on African security, stability and independence. As response to Cold War diplomacy, Africa and other emergent states in the international system formulated the non-aligned movement as a way out of the ideological posturing of superpowers. Poverty and ideological deficiency undermined the non-aligned movement which states flirted between the two camps with dangerous consequences to the stability of their nation-states. African states which pursued independent paths to modernity and prosperity were either denied, neglected or destabilized; while others compromised their independence, collaborated with the forces of imperialism and became arrowheads in the hands of capitalist predators. This paper attempts an overview of the bi-polar world system and its implications for United States policy towards Africa between 1945 and 1990. Inter-alia, the paper posits that the continued chase for a place in the orbit of occidentalism from idealist viewpoint rather reinforces dependency than reconcile the contradictions of underdevelopment. The paper also decries the ideological deficiency and reechoes the call for African development to be anchored on an ideological beacon as a sure way of giving succor to its independence.

Key words: Ideology; Imperialism; Dependency; African independence; Cold war

INTRODUCTION

It is often said that a fool at forty is a fool forever; Africa is well over fifty and still yawning from colonial memorabilia, leadership inertia, and followership amnesia. These seeming pathological complications which have affected all the components of state structure have produced results antithetical to development. It could no longer be convincing 50 years after, to attribute Africa's manifest problems to European colonialism as Walter Rodney (1974), thesis postulates. In line with a paradigm shift in interpretation, Igwe (2010), has noted glaring evidences of Africa's backwardness in global politics in his titled thesis *How Africa underdeveloped Africa.*

Cut throat competition for the control and appropriation of national resources by geo-ethnic groups, massive corruption and lootocracy accompanying high political offices as in Nigeria, external manipulation of international economic relations for strategic and energy needs to mention a few, have contributed immensely to becloud the focus of state machinery. More worrisome is the mistaken assumption that socio-economic and political salvation can come from outside Africa, even when farsighted traditional and some modern African elite sounded a note of caution from the rays of Occidentalism for obvious predatory implications. These warnings by the doyens of African nationalism seem to have fallen on deaf ears of today's political leaders who mistake globalization and capitalist manifestation for development and modernity. It has become fashionable for the ruling

class in Africa to ally with the forces of imperialism and neocolonialism in the guise of technical assistance, advice and collaboration. Service delivery has long ceased to be a yardstick for measuring achievement. Rather, a foreign trip to the world's capitals' to solicit support for tenure elongation in office has become the cornerstone of our democratic experiment. These worrisome developments have really questioned the sincerity of African nationalism and independence. This paper shall consider the importance of ideology in nation building, the bi-polar international system and Africa's responses and the implications of the bi-polar system on US-Africa policy to 1990, then conclusion.

1. THE SEARCH FOR IDEOLOGY AND THE NEXUS BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE

After the fashion of Ulysses the ancient mariner, "it is never too late to seek a newer world," so also is the call for an ideological beacon to anchor socio-economic and political development of Africa not new and still very crucial in the search for Africa's "liberation" 50 or more years after Africa's independence. In a speech to the Cuban people on the occasion of the seventh anniversary of the Cuban revolution, Amilcar Cabral decried thus:

> the ideological deficiency, not to say the total lack of ideology, within the national liberation movements- which is basically due to ignorance of the historical reality which these movements claim to transform-constitutes one of the greatest weaknesses of our struggle against imperialism, if not the greatest weakness of all. (Cabral, 1966)

In a similar vein, Frantz Fanon asserted thus:

> The deeper I enter into the cultures and the political circles the surer I am that the greater danger that threatens Africa is the absence of ideology.

In Ideology and National Consciousness Patrick F. Wilinot (1980) noted:

> When the need for an ideology is expressed they [political leaders], immediately wave the red-herring of the foreignness of any ideology opposed to their own personal, individual interests, forgetting that while they have no ideology of their own, their action is still structured by ideologies formulated in New York, Paris, London, Bonn, and that the interests they serve tantamount to treason against the nation.

Wilmot defines ideology as a system of ideas which generates and sustains action. Accordingly, it is a function of ideology to define interest, to establish their order and priority, to create structures of action which seeks to enhance and defend those interests (Wilmot, 1980, p.3).

I may add that "ignorance of the historical reality" of national independence constitutes one of the greatest dangers in our march to nationhood.

Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah, the vociferous anti-imperialist and one time Prime Minister of Ghana in West Africa, is often quoted as saying "seek ye first the political kingdom, and all other things shall be added unto it"; this 'oft-quote', to say the least, explains the momentous and enthusiastic frenzy with which African nationalist attached to political independence. Unknown to Nkrumah and his African compatriots, political independence felt short of expectations once it was divorced from the economic sub-structure which had been organically integrated into the orbit of western capital. With the economic levers of progress in the hands of former colonial masters and their local agents, African independence bent backwards to the colonizers for technical and economic assistance, for modernization policies, development strategies and so on. Some statesmen even collaborated with the forces of imperialism to remain in the pinnacle of power at the expenses of popular will. Little or nothing was done to dismantle those structures of oppression which became a "conundrum to the post-colonial countries."

Collaboration with forces inimical to African independence is a negative historical trend which originated with imperialism and colonialism. It is recalled that during the invasion of the African continent by white predators in the 19th century, African potentates devised varying modus-vivendi to contain the punitive and rude diplomatic manoeuvering of the colonizing powers. Whereas some put up fierce resistance to defend their territories and independence, others perceived the futility in resistance and diplomatically collaborated with the invading powers to maintain their hold on the throne and conduct trade which was fast changing hands. From Cape to Cario, African potentates in the 19th century were not passive onlookers during the violation of their territorial integrity by foreign powers. In what is remembered in the literature as "primary resistance", African chiefs defended their independence with all the available arsenals in their armory until force of circumstance worked against their efforts. It is in this vein that one can speak of Samori Toure as the "Bonaparte of the Sudan", (West Africa), the mau-mau rebellion in East Africa (Kenya) the Muktar rebellion in North Africa (Libya) and the Zulu and Hottentot wars in the Southern African enclave. In West Africa, Michael Crowder's edited work on resistance is illustrative.

It is rather unfortunate that in the rich pool of historical knowledge, we have either learnt nothing and forgotten nothing or leaders draw only the negative, which is why collaboration with the forces of neocolonialism is not only a contradiction of African independence but questions the very essence of African nationalism. Ideological deficiency or lack of it underscores the many administrative and foreign policy blunders of many regimes in Africa. Wilmot's observation made many years back is still relevant in our march to nationhood:

> … today, we observe the spectacle of statesmen, political leaders who, through design or accident, find themselves at the helm of the affairs of state not only confessing that they have no ideology—men without the slightest conception of nationhood—formulate national development plans, speak of the national interest and demand from the innocent school children loyalty to a nation whose flame they daily suppress through collaboration with forces inimical to national existence.

Indeed, it is only in Africa that a national interest exists without a national ideology. It is the absences of a national ideology that could lead a head of state who swore to maintain the territorial integrity of his Nation-state cede away the same to another country in the guise of observing international law. The other day, Abduloye Wade, the Senegalese president speaking on the prospects of NEPAD commented thus:

> …the problem is not to take all this (sic) and bring to the G8 and say, please you finance this—my view is to ask G8 to help Africa to create the conditions that allow us to attract capital—(Bukarambe, 2004, p.31)

NEPAD is the latest comer in Africa's development trajectory widely acclaimed to be an African own initiative that should resolve all the contradictions associated with under-development and backwardness. Unfortunately, since 2001 till date NEPAD is still ''in the Nigerian Dock'' (NIIA, 2004)[1]. If Africa has to invite world powers of the G-8 club to help create the conditions that "allow us to attract capital", as clarified by Mr. President, the implications are obvious. The invitation is a signal to the loss of African independence and or a call to entrench neocolonialism and further dependency. For obvious reasons, the dynamics of international economic relations respond favorably to capital and capitalist interest and not in the interest of peripheral economies that were originally meant to feed the capital. Secondly, the industrialized economies of the G-8 Club are not insulated from the vagaries of international economic system which they have to guide against or protect. These facts remain be clouded to African leaders who continue to assume that the international economy would be out of sympathy work in its favor.

France's military presence in the West African state of Mali, 50 years after, and parades as the power which possesses the material and psychological pre-requisite for conflict management, resolution and control is a mockery. If it is in this sense that Wade was talking about helping Africa to create a favorable climate for 'capital', then the invasion and re-colonization of Africa is not far- fetched, after all, international laws are made, interpreted and repudiated by the same forces of international capital to protect their interests in the international arena. The lessons of Congo, Somalia,

[1] NEPAD in the Nigerian Dock. (2004). *Proceedings of a Conference organized by the Nigerian Institute of Int'l Affairs* (NIIA) in collaboration with the Friedrich Ebert foundation.

Angola, Libya and neighbouring Iraq are harsh and fresh and reiterate the inevitability and imminence of an African ideology, if we must arrest the drift, remain united and stronger in an international environment which elevates power and profit to the detriment of humanity.

African states pretended to respond to the call for ideology in nation building by resorting to "defensive radicalism", as an ideological ploy. As postulated by Claude (1978), "defensive radicalism", is an attempt at mystification; the assumption of a radical posture and the use of this posture as a cover for containing revolutionary pressures and for maintaining the status quo." Only a few African states which attempted to tread the path of socialism could be vindicated from these ideological pretensions. The reality however is that we can no longer afford to grope in the dark, ideological inevitability cannot be over emphasized. The United States and other industrialized nations appreciate the role of ideology in nation building and continue to use the same with maximum results. If Africa has an interest or recognizes it has, it is the function of ideology to create the structures of action which should seek to enhance and defend those interests. As aptly summarized by Barrack Obama (2004), "Africa's future is up to Africans".

2. THE BI-POLAR INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM AND THE NON-ALIGN MOVEMENT

Bi-polarism, is a term which has been used to characterize the state of diametric opposition by the two super powers after the second world war (1939—1945). The cold war, as this era was called from 1947, refers to the period of the prevalence of the psychological or ideological opposition between the dominant blocs in the world. The two dominant blocs then were the Western (capitalist) bloc under the leadership of the US and the Eastern (socialist) bloc, the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republic, (USSR), under the hegemony of Russia.

The cold war is usually referred to as psychological warfare because it was fought without the conventional weapons of warfare and characterized by bi-polarism with each side working assiduously to gain spheres of influence and deterrence. Each super power attempted to achieve military superiority in the area of nuclear armament which, as noted by Asogwa (1999), was the most dreaded weapon then. The balance of power which resulted from the rivalries and competition produced a balance of terror which saved the world from a Third World war. During the era, US president, Harry S. Truman formulated the Truman's doctrine and the Marshall plan as packages to assist Greece and Turkey and help any other country that was threatened by communism. He asserted that:

at the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one. One way of life is based on the will of the majority [democracy]…. the second way of life is based upon the will of a minority [totalitarianism]…, I believe that it must be policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures…(Higgins, 1984, pp.43-44)

Truman's declaration was a definition of American foreign policy which was to last up to the 1980s. This rather global policy which came to be known as "containment", principally guided US foreign policy behavior in Europe and beyond with severe implication for its African policy which is examined in the subsequent segment. Haven sworn to crush communism everywhere in the world, and noting that "the choice is too often not a free one" independent nation-states across the continent polarized into the two rival blocs as a matter of course. As subject people still under the colonial umbrella of their metropolitan countries, Africa and other Third World nations, like the proverbial tortoise, tactically opted for neutrality as the best approach to the cold war. By 1947 when the cold war intensified very few African countries were independent. They include Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia and South Africa. The choice of neutrality from cold war diplomatic entanglement could well be captured dramatically by a very courageous statement by General Murtala Mohammed some years later as follows:

The time has come when we should make it clear that we can decide for ourselves, that we know our own interests and how to protect those interests; that we are capable of resolving African problems without presumptuous lessons in ideological dangers which more often than not, have no relevance for us nor for the problems at hand. (cited in Wilmot, 1989, p.8)

That the above remarks made by an African head of state (Nigerian), about 20 years after Truman's declaration should have earned the head of state's dear life in a bloody coup d'tat testify eloquently to US commitment to "the choice is too often not a free one." The non-align movement, a diplomatic contraption of Third world nations of mostly Afro-Asian composition with India, Egypt, and Yugoslavia among the founding members, was intended by these nation-states to follow an independent policy in foreign affairs, not getting involved in the mutually suspicious and hostile politico military pursuit of the super powers. To be neutral but not passive was intended to ensure impartiality in judgement, actions and policies and to take decisions not influenced by cold war protagonists. Maintaining equidistance between the East and the West was also, a means of protecting the independence and sovereignty of the newly independent states of Africa and Asia.

Ojo and Sesay (2002) capture Kwame Nkumah's views on non-alignments thus:

It is not a policy of indifference, it is a policy of positive action in international affairs particularly with regard to avoid peace and cooperation. Powers which pursues policies of goodwill and cooperation and constructive international action will always find us by their side. (Ojo & Sesay, 2002, p.148)

The basis for non-alignment as a major foreign policy plank as noted by Ojo and Sasey include:

(i) To get economic and technical assistance which cannot be achieved if the Afro-Asian counties openly sided with either of the super powers. Developing equidistance with respect to the East and the West would help them approach either of the two powers and their allies for badly needed assistance to meet the overwhelming task of nation building.

(ii) Having emerged from the excruciating experiences of colonialism, the newly independent states needed a tranquil world system which would enable them to resolve their daunting economic, social and political issues. Assistance and cooperation from both blocs could only be secured by non-commitment to their quarrels.

(iii) The new states believed that with the cold war scenario, neutrality would contribute immensely to world peace and security by mediating between the super powers.

(iv) Lastly, the Afro-Asian countries hoped to narrow the areas of conflict in the international system considering the intensive recruitment drive which both super powers embarked upon during the period. Basking in the above premise, the non-aligned states endeavored to befriend both super powers, visiting Washington, Moscow, Peking and opening up embassies. In that regard, non-alignment as asserted by Ojo and Sasay, had no permanent friends in the international system, only a permanent interest, the preservation of world peace and security.

If the Afro-Asian states assumed that neutrality in the cold war imbroglio was a smart diplomatic manoeuvring, they were mistaken; for as John Forster Dulles, the US secretary of state asserted; "non-alignment was immoral because it did not side with the US". (Ojo & Sasay, 2002, p.151) The implication of the above assertion and the dilemma of the colonial situation will constitute the subject of the last segment.

3. BI-POLARISM AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR US AFRICA POLICY 1945-1990

Bi-polarism and the policy of 'containment' enunciated had by the US had far reaching implications for the security and stability of African states. Containment not only "completely subordinated most African and Asian issues to the success of the plan for European recovery and rearmament" (Kolko, 1988), it tested and ridiculed

the legitimacy and reality of African independence. US role as a major player in European reconstruction, and the ensuring cold war with the USSR gave vent to irrational foreign policy decisions against African states and the Third world at large.

American involvement in Africa from the 1950s was facilitated by the gradual disengagement of the colonial powers who have been opposed to any active involvement of a foreign power in their sphere of influence. The Anglo-American relationship traceable to the John Jay treaty of 1794, the Consular Convention signed between the United Kingdom and the US in 1951, and Britain's waning power over empire during the era of decolonization, all served as green light for the US to proceed with her increased political contacts with Africa. (Enor, 2012) The US cultural exchange program of the state department in the 1950s was also remarkable for strengthening US-Africa relations; it also exposed African leaders to the many areas of similarities and cooperation.

To Africa, the US meant many things; an inspiring example of a successful multiethnic federation, a big brother and pally to look up to in times of strain and stress; the US was not only a voice in the international arena, it was a founding member of the United Nations, and the North Atlantic treaty organization (NATO). Haven staged the first successful anti-colonial war of independence, Africa relied on the US to meaningfully utilize its potentials to assist it wards off the yoke of colonialism and the evolution of most colonial territories into nation-hood. This hope was made more germane by the historical fact that America did not have any direct colonial role in Africa, and twice in the 20th century, it has been involved in world wars to make the world safe for democracy. As a founding member of the UN, the US participated in the formulation of the organizations policies on decolonization. When in 1945, Prime Minister Wilson Churchill was quoted as saying he would not preside over the liquidation of British Empire, the US impressed upon the principle of self-determination of subject people which was first propagated during the peace of Versailles in 1919, and demanded that Britain recognized the independence of colonial subjects. African leaders could not be oblivious to the specific and general roles of the US and other world powers within the UN on the colonial question.

This seeming paternalistic posturing of US soon assumed a new turn in the cold war years, when it wavered between containing expansionist communism and the essentially European focused view of world economic reconstruction. As Gabriel (1988) noted, anti-communism defined the practical foundation of US-African policy. The US lost to the USSR her enviable reputation as an anti-imperial champion especially as the issue of decolonization became one of the arsenals of cold war rivalry between the super powers. Developing countries,

who hitherto received enormous economic and technical assistance from the US, isolated her in preference of Soviet anti-colonial posture. The USSR did not hesitate to apply this arsenal in the cold war which won for her the sympathy and friendship of many newly admitted members of the third world into the UN. Perceiving that its influence among the young independent nations had diminished to very low ebb, the US dramatically rebounced with enormous financial assistance to some African states in what the Soviet described as dollar diplomacy to win more friends to her orbit. From this viewpoint, the cold war was a mixed-blessing to Africa. Soviet posturing on the colonial question was highly appreciated by African leaders, and when in 1960, the US with the colonial powers refused to approve the UN resolution 1514 on colonial independence, George (1992), remarked that the US officially joined the colonial powers "as the enemies of decolonization", or rather, "colonialist-imperial exploiters".

It is pertinent to state that even before the event of 1960, which put the US as a collaborator with "imperial exploiters", many studies commissioned by the US to both understand Africa as well as draw up an appropriate policy position, furthered and practically, imposed US-NATO interest in Africa. Two significant references in this regard would be necessary here. In 1957, a US special mission to Africa defined America's interest in Africa as follows:

> An interest in the evolution of Africa in a manner not enemical to our democratic type of government, the exclusion of influences unfriendly to our way of life, the hope by having access to the raw materials of that continent, especially to safeguard our minimum strategic needs.... (Obiozor, 1992, p.10).

Equally captured by Obiozor is the Herskovit Report on Africa, which one of its recommendations stated thus:

> US policy in furthering its own best interest and in accord with the action of some of our own NATO associates should be guided by expectation of the primacy of Africans in all Sub-Saharan Africa

The pursuit of African policy as enunciated above could not be disguised. The US furthered its policy like an imperial power; gain political allies in the cold war access to oil and diamonds, naval bases to monitor and safeguard its politico-economic interest and so on. The implication of the aforementioned policy on Africa cannot be over emphasized. The US did go a long way to cause African nations to conform to its new world order. Some of these realist pursuits of the national interest are considered.

The deradicalization of social forces in Africa; "whether they appear as regimes, movements, parties, institutions or ideologically conscious groups", with the intent to weaken and keep Africa from being radical. Angola during Augustino Neto, Mozambique in Samora Michel's regime, Libya under Qhadaffi, SWAPO and the

African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa were all such regimes that experienced concerted assault from the forces of imperialism acting directly, or by proxy. The progressive forces, opined Ake, "offer the only hope for the emancipation and development of Africa—, it is they alone who can respond to the mobilization of Africa's only viable weapon of emancipation namely the energy of the African masses—." (Ihonbere, 1989, p.95)

The shoring up of reactionary or puppet regimes in Africa, in what Claude Ake calls "Satellization of Africa", "entails propping up and bringing into existence submissive reactionary regimes, maintaining and reinforcing Africa's exploitative dependence, shielding Africa against radical influences—" (Ihonvbere) even maintaining military presence as France in Mali and military bases in North Africa until the emergence of col. Maumar Gadaffi in 1969 expelled foreigners essentially of western extraction from those bases. The shoring up of despotic regimes in the Maghreb states of North Africa as a check on Libya and other interests is partly responsible for the explosive political upheavals which swept the Maghreb states from December, 2010 in what is remembered as the Arab spring (Enor, 2013). When the US supported free democracies, "it was inclined to employ the ideas on the crucial role of the military in modernizing new nations — if only to locate sympathetic anti-communist—" (Kolko, 1988, pp.188-189). The US preferred and supported military regimes in Africa as "coups were a healthy response to foreign alien ideologies". In Congo, the US propped up Col. Mobutu Sese Seko who in turn collaborated with the West and became the arrow head in the hands of imperial forces in their destabilization processes in Africa. It is little wonder that vociferous sons of Africa with socialist leaning met their untimely sepulcre by the activities of subversive agencies of the West. Prime Ministers Nkruma (Ghana) Patrice lomumba (Congo), Murtala Mohammed (Nigeria) and so on, met their untimely death in those pitiable circumstances. To imagine that an African head of state could be used as proxy, against other independent African states tells not only of the lack of an ideology but the contradiction of African independence. Kolko noted that between 1963 and 1968, there were as many as sixty four military mutinies and failed or successful coups in Africa master minded or so it seemed, by imperialist agencies with the intention to usher in "the free world economic doctrine and technology". Today, the extent and degree to which the free economic doctrine has tackled African underdevelopment with the colossal losses in human and material resources can only be imagined. These more than any other factor guarantees instability and underdevelopment.

CONCLUSION

The naked pursuit of the national interest from realist viewpoint which accompanied the policy of containment enunciated by the US after the Second World War had far reaching implications for the stability, security and independence of African states. This situation is compounded by the near fact of ideological deficiency which has caused the continent to be vulnerable to international economic manipulations leading to dependency and internal weaknesses. The result is the endless political gerrymandering and economic squadermania in most African states. The sooner African statesmen recourse to the clarion call by their founding fathers for a pan-African unity with an inward looking development agenda, the healthier for the progress of the continent which possess some of the world's most needed strategic mineral resources.

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