

THE AFRICAN UNION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN AFRICA: THE NEED FOR AFRICAN MILITARY FORCE

ONWUKA OYIBO GODDEY

08035411904

Lecturer

Department Of History
College Of Education, Agbor,
Delta State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Africa since independence has experienced different conflicts that plagued her developmental initiatives. These conflicts diverted African resources to non-productive uses and made Africa to waste her energies and abilities on comparatively worthless objects. The root causes of these conflicts were local but the dynamics which fuelled them were tied to regional and inter-ethnic rivalries. These conflicts seek to tear the nations involved apart. The problem of fostering continental peace has not gone without notice among African states. The Organization of African Unity, later African Union, has since its formation in 1963 been involved in the resolution of conflicts in Africa through the use of ad-hoc committees without much success recorded. There is need for policy re-orientation on the part of the African union for effective performance. This article focuses on the need for the establishment of an Africa Military Force.

AFRICAN POLITICAL CONFLICTS AFTER INDEPENDENCE

Africa is largely composed of states of colonial origin. The year 1960 was a year of mass independence for Africa. The attainment of independence was celebrated with pomp and pageantry. However it was to pass through a test of time because of the legacies the departing colonial masters left behind. One of the legacies is colonial boundaries which has become a source of inter-state conflicts in Africa.

The boundaries that separate the countries of Africa from one another today were drawn by the European powers in a meeting held in Berlin to partition Africa among themselves. The interests of the African people whose land they shared were not taken into account when the partitioning took place. Hence almost all the boundaries cut across existing states and ethnic groups separating them into two or more territories. The partitioning also

brought together different states and ethnic groups that were antagonistic to one another. This was a time-bomb that was soon to explode when the creators left the scene leaving the neighbouring states to war against one another.

The African leaders pledged to have complete respect for the legacy they received from the colonial legacy. The Togolese information minister, Kwaovi Benyi Johnson in 1976 described this sacrosanct principle of the immutability of African frontiers as a wise idea at the time of OAU'S inception, but one which at present does not stand up to an objective historical analysis as it avoids the fundamental question of human groupings separated by colonial treaties. (Cervenka: 1977). The pledge by the African leaders soon failed and Africa was thrown into a theatre of boundary disputes and civil wars that persists till today. As Anwar (1977) pointed out, the center of international conflict has moved to our continent in the past months, with all that this means in the sowing of seeds of dissention, division and disruption among the sons of the continent and involving them in conflicts which they reap no benefits and which permit interference in the internal affairs of the African States. Suddenly, these states have found themselves in a conflict that is designed to subjugate and make them follow a course conflicting with the concept of the destined solidarity of Africa. In different parts of Africa, boarder disputes erupted. Some of these disputes includes Morocco and Somalia, Somalia and Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya, Ghana and Burkina Faso, Burkina Faso and Mali, Niger and Benin, Uganda and Tanzania, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, Chad and Libya, Ghana and Upper Volta and, Nigeria and Cameroun.

Apart from boarder disputes, African countries were also involved in civil wars. These civil wars were caused as a result of the struggle for political and economic control of the state between rival and ethnic groups. This struggle led to disunity and national rift among the ethnic groups. Infact most African conflicts and crises begin with the struggle of a less privileged ethnic group to maintain political and perhaps economic power as designed by the colonial administration or the struggle of the less-privileged group to upset the status-quo (Orobator: 1996). In Nigeria, the first military coup of January 1966 was aimed at reducing or annihilating the Hausa-Fulani dominance of political administration of the country while the July 1966 coup was aimed at reinstating the status-quo. The events that followed led to the thirty months of civil war.

The North-South struggle for political control of Chad also led to the Chadian Crisis that lingered on for decades. In Ethiopia, the Ethiopian civil war was fought as a result of the protests by the less privileged Eritreans, Tigreans and Oromos against the domination of the Amharas. In Zaire, the war began on a similar note. The struggle for power was between the

privileged Gbadotite district and the Shaba group of the Bandundu, Kasai Lunda and Luba districts.

Another source of conflict in Africa is corruption. There is hardly any African country where corruption has not been a major problem. The desire of the privileged few for political control is prompted by the insatiable quest to emasse corrupt wealth. The determination to fulfill this desire leads the political class to attempt to cling onto political and economic power using every dishonest means at their disposal in the process. It is either one African leader declaring himself life president or campaigning for a third-term in office or a dominant ethnic group holding on to power as if it is their divine right.

The high level of political and economic corruption often gave rise to a feeling of discontent and consequently military intervention. The military often came in as a corrective measure promising to abolish corruption and tribalism. But this has not always been the case. Sometimes the military became more corrupt and tribalistic than the civilian government they overthrew. This is however not to discredit the military as some of them have contributed to national development. One can now see that African political scene in the early years after independence was that of conflict and crises.

AFRICAN UNION ATTEMPTS AT CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN AFRICA

The Organization of African Unity was founded in 1963. In 2002 it was replaced by the African Union. One of the cardinal objectives for the formation of the Organization is the "peaceful settlement of disputes by negotiation, mediation and conciliation or arbitration". However the organization has not been very successful in the resolution of conflicts in Africa.

Conflict resolution according to Northage (1976) involves a "collection of proposed techniques ranging from the reduction of psychological abnormalities among the leaders of states, to playing out international conflict in the form of games so as to release and hopefully eliminate tensions inherent in them". The object in any rational form of conflict analysis or conflict resolution is not the wholesale elimination of conflict from human affairs. It is rather to improve the established means of resolving international conflicts, to consider new means of conflict resolution and if possible to reduce incidence of conflict between nation states so as to divert the time and energy now spent on the settlement of international differences to more productive uses.

Different methods have been used for the resolution of inter-state and intra-state conflicts. One popular method is diplomacy. But apart from

diplomacy, it is always possible to resolve a conflict by forceful means, that is, by the forceful imposition of a solution by one side of the conflict or the other or by a third party.

Article III of the OAU provides for the "peaceful settlement of disputes by negotiation, mediation conciliation or arbitration". The guiding principles in the settlement of disputes include "non-interference in the internal affairs of states and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each state and for its inalienable right to independent existence". Less than five months after its formation the Algerian-Morocco border dispute erupted. The cause of this crisis was Morocco's claim to a large area of Algerian held Sahara. Morocco's claim to this Saharan region of Algeria arose largely out of the fluid territorial arrangement which the French and the Sultan of Morocco had made during the colonial era. (Agbi: 1986). There were also ideological and economic factors to the causes of the conflict. The conflict brought the OAU to test. At the end, it succeeded in clarifying issues and narrowing the gap in areas of disagreement but failed to bring about final settlement. On 15th June, 1972 the two countries signed an agreement bringing the conflict to an end.

The Ethiopia-Somali dispute which started in 1960 is a typical illustration of the legacy of artificial boundaries created by the colonial powers in the 19th century. The causes of this war of irredentism were ethno-cultural, historical, political and religious. While Morocco insisted on OAU mediation, Somali preferred the United Nations security. Although the OAU was given a rebuff, it still took decision which is coherent with its policy on boundary despite.

The Nigerian civil war 1967-1970 is one of the most devastating conflicts in contemporary Africa. The cause of this conflict can be traced to several factors all linked to the colonial legacy. The amalgamation of 1914 placed the Northern part of the country in an advantageous position to perpetually control the political life of the nation. This coupled with the electoral malpractices of 1964 to 1965, wide spread corruption, tribalism and nepotism led to the military take over of January 1966. The events that followed the military take over led to the civil war of July 6, 1967 to January 15, 1970. The OAU did its best to resolve the Nigerian-Biafran crisis within the OAU framework without success. Although the OAU had genuine desire to bring about peace but without a force of its own, it is difficult to see how the OAU can possess an ability to act decisively as in the Nigerian situation (Agbi 1986). Kamanu (1974) insisted that the OAU's failure to resolve the crisis was due to its narrow interpretation of the charter which in his opinion favours inaction. It is true that the non-interference clause of the organization ties its hands in dealing decisively with civil conflicts, but from whatever angle are views it, the OAU failed to resolve the Nigerian conflict.

The conflict in Chad was caused by the unequal development it inherited from the colonial era between the Christian and better-educated population of the south and the predominantly Moslem and much less educated population of the North of the country. The failure of Chad's first president Francis Tombalbaye to bridge the gap in both education and economic development between the two halves of the country coupled with his harsh and autocratic rule led to the emergence of determined opposition to his rule from his people both of the north and south. The formation of the National liberation front of Chad (FROLINAT) in 1963 strengthened the opposition movement in Chad. In April 1975 President Tombalbaye was killed in a military coup d'etat organized by his southern military officers. The conflict in Chad became complicated leading to OAU intervention.

The civil war in Chad was the first event that moved the OAU from the conference table to the battle field, with the first inter-African peace keeping force organized under the auspices of the OAU. The OAU tried but failed to restore peace in Chad. The OAU troops withdrew in June 1982 following the expiration of its mandate.

The OAU has not been very effective in the resolution of conflicts in Africa. Today there are volatile fratricidal conflicts in every subregion of the continent. This has led many African states to use their scarce resources in the purchase of weapons of mass destruction. This stands as a threat to the much desired unity and peace in African states. The OAU also finds it difficult to organize soldiers from member states for peace keeping operations.

THE NEED FOR AFRICAN MILITARY FORCE

The political conflicts and crises in Africa weaken the foundations of African unity and the development of the continent as they weaken the economic growth and political integration of the individual nations. Battered and saddled on all sides by the civil strife within and between its member nations the OAU has been unable to fulfill its cardinal objectives (Oronator: 1996). One of the reasons the AU too has not been able to achieve the much desired unity and resolve her conflicts is because it has no standing military force with which to impose peace when necessary.

Today forty-three years since its formation the African Union is still experiencing conflicts in different parts of the continent. In Darfur 200,000 people have died and some two million have been displaced since the crisis started in 2003. Elsewhere, two neighbouring countries, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea are still in dispute over the sovereignty of Corisco, Mbanie and Cocotiers Islands believed to be rich in oil. In Cote d'Ivoire the crisis that started since September 2002 still remains unresolved.

The Organization has not been able to restore peace to troubled Africa. Time has come to give the A.U teeth and to make it a positive

instrument that can shape the destinies of the African peoples (Cervenka: 1977). To do this some parts of the organization's charter need to be amended and provision should be made in the amended charter for the establishment of an A.U Military Force.

The idea of a joint African High Command was first advocated by President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana along the lines of his concept of the continental Union of African states. The African leaders were however sceptical of the purpose of the command. The African High command as conceived by Nkrumah is not intended for use in the maintenance of internal law and order in any member-state without the expressed request of the duly constituted government deemed to be acting on behalf of the majority of its people. Even so the conditions for the use of the united armed force will be clearly defined so as not to appear in any way to interfere in the internal affairs of any African state. (Cervenka: 1977)

If Africa must play a decisive role in world politics, the establishment of an African Military Force is the answer. The establishment of the force is necessary in checking extra-regional aggression and inter-state conflicts. The Africa Military Force will weld Africa into an effective force capable of creating its own progress and contributing significantly to the attainment of world peace. The failure of the A.U to resolved the conflicts that plague Africa with any decisiveness makes the establishment of an African Military Force very important. This will enable the Organization resolve her conflicts effectively. Its formation will also encourage co-operation among member-states in military matters and complement the peacekeeping efforts of the UN in Africa.

CONCLUSION

The paper has examined the role the African union played in the resolution of conflicts in the continent. It revealed that Africa has experienced conflicts that shook the foundation of her unity. The study also revealed that the A.U has been relatively ineffective in the resolution of inter-state conflicts in the continent. There is need for policy re-orientation and the establishment of an African Military Force if Africa must play a decisive role in world politics. African leaders should examine the Organization's charter with the view of amending some of the clauses.

REFERENCES

- Agbi, S.O (1986) *The Organization of African Unity and African diplomacy, 1963-1979*. Ibadan: Impact publishers Nig. Ltd.
- Cervenka, Z. (1977), *The Unfinished Quest for African Unity: African and*

the O.A.U London: Julius Friedman Publishers Ltd.

Kamanu, O. (1974) Secession and the Right of self Determination An O.A.U Dilemma; *Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 12, Nov. 3

Northage, F.S. (1976) *The International Political System*, London: Faber and Faber.

Orobator, S.E (1996) *Political Conflicts and Crises in Africa: Origin, Development and Management 1960-1995*, Benin: Ethiope Publishing Corporation.

Sadat, A (1977) Address presented to the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity at Libreville on 2 July

The Guardian Tuesday 3 October, 2006.



READINGS IN

**CONFLICT MANAGEMENT
AND PEACE BUILDING IN AFRICA**

VOLUME I

Edited by

Douglason G. Omotor, Ph.D
Franklins A. Sanubi, Ph.D
Prof. Andrew I. Ohwona
