

**THE CHALLENGES FACING AFRICAN UNION IN ACHIEVING  
CONTINENTAL SECURITY: TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF  
SOME ENLIGHTENING VIEWS AT THE NEW MILLENNIUM**

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**Abstract**

Africa is on the radar screen of global public opinion in an exceptional way. The end of the cold war did marshal in an era of anticipation and encouragement in Africa, a continent that had been adversely affected by slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and cold war politics. The making of the African Union (AU) is an outcome of the need to redefine Africa in the framework of global environment that is primarily directed towards achievement of security of not only member states and the continent at large but also at individual level. Arising from modern understanding of security the African continent is embroiled in security challenges that the newly transformed African multilateral institution has to address. The paper seeks to examine the causes of insecurity that seem to have emerged from auspicious combination of factors that cut across all spheres of human interaction, i.e. personal, institutional, lack of unity of purpose, conflict of interest, lack of standards of measurement, lack of technology and lack of resources. The paper will further expose the weaknesses characterizing multilateral institutions in ensuring security in Africa and the world over. It will also provide a critical answer to two basic international relations questions: who conducts global policy and who owns global strategic resources. Largely, the paper proves the importance of regions as objects of analysis, where one can find outcomes and sources of explanations for the whole and the basis through which security can be realized.

**Introduction**

The coming of independence in African countries, though at different times in the past five decades beginning in the 1950s, heralded a new era of euphoria and hope underpinned by the promises by nationalist politicians. Sooner than later did the countries realize their insecurity. What have been the causes of the problem remained mirrored in

controversy. Meredith (2005) is of the view that problems begun with colonialism where territories in Africa were available to anyone who laid claims to it. But Walter Rodney goes further to analyze how early encounters with the outside world affected development in Africa especially through slavery (1974). A closer scrutiny depict that the security problems of the African countries are noticeable in two spheres: internal vulnerability and changes in the international system.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Issues**

The definition of security, like many concepts in international relations, has been a contentious one. The military sphere as the reference point has dominated the development of the concepts. According to Buzan (1998:9)

*“... it is when an issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designed referent object (traditionally, state incorporating government, territory and society). The definition can be understood as it relates to sectors- military sector...the referent object is usually state and other kinds of political entities, survival of armed forces either in defense of the state or supporting routine world order activities such as peacekeeping or humanitarian intervention; political sector pertains to sovereignty and /or the ideology. Economically, depends on various objects within-banks, markets, national economic performance; societal-large scale collective indenties that can function independent of the state such as nations and religions; environmental- survival of individual species, types of habitat, planet climate and biosphere.”*

Security is about reducing the risk of organized violence in public life, and appears at three different levels i.e. threats states pose to each other especially anything that questions recognition, legitimacy or governing authority. Other threats institutions of organized violence pose to states and regimes, those that hold the means of violence pose to citizens and society. (Bowker in Sakwa and Evans 2000:7) Then international security becomes a relational matter, it's about how human collectivities relate to each other in terms of threats and vulnerability, it also addresses the ways such collectivities relate to the threats from natural environment (1998:10).

Security community according to Deutsch is formed among participating actors when their peoples, and particularly their political elites, held stable expectations of peace between themselves in the present and for the future (Newnham and Evans 1992:294) The study of security as a central component of international relations is itself multidisciplinary for it encompasses historical, economic, cultural and psychological centered on the relationship between military capabilities and other forms of power (Dougherty, E.J and Pfaltzgraff 1997:559). Little can be said about the security of an isolated object, for example, an African country alone, or international regional institution alone, but can be studied in a wider context; states as they relate to each, within and outside Africa. This led to the concept of security complex.

Security complex refers to a set of states whose major perceptions and concerns are so intertwined that their national problems cannot be reasonably analyzed or resolved apart from the other (Buzan et al 1998:12). Security complex is a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from another.

Richard Sakwa and Anne Stevenes provided insights to defining a continent and dimensions that exist such as ideologies, geography, religion and language (Richard Sakwa and Anne Stevenes 2000). Mike Bowker provided a framework upon which post cold war international security issues could be comprehended. He noted that two schools of thought seem to be dominant - universalist- perceived the emergence of “one worldism” and the other world view that emphasized fragmentation and division (Mike Bowker in Richard Sakwa and Anne Stevenes 2000). These schools of thought provide a basis through which the African Union could be evaluated in its attempt to achieve continental security.

The internal dynamics of security complex can be located along a spectrum according to whether the defining of security interdependence is driven by amity or enmity. In the negative lies conflict formation in which interdependence arises from fear, rivalry and mutual perception of threat. In the middle lie security regimes in which states treat each other as potential threats but have made assurance arrangements to reduce the security dilemma among them. At the positive end lives pluralistic security comity in which states no longer expect to use force in their relations with each other. Regional integration will eliminate security complex. This vision has shaped the transformation of the Organization of African Unity into African Union

Security complex theory posits that the existence of regional sub-systems as objects of security analysis offers an analytical framework for dealing with those systems. The realist notion of threats is too narrow, focusing on state’s military security and territorial integrity, and needs to move towards a holistic view of security to include

societal and economic realms. Thus the African Union needs to take cognisance of this fact to ensure full realization of continental security.

Collective security as espoused by Goldstein is the formation of a broad alliance of most major actors in an international system for jointly opposing an aggressor actor (1986:84) As advocated by Kant, the majority of states could unite to punish any one state that committed aggression (ibid). But with the end of cold war there appeared a new debate that has centered on Democratic peace theory. This theory posits that democratic countries are less likely and liable to fight against each. Critical security theory can cope with any threats which have been ignored, like natural disasters and poverty, because the existing security debate, especially realism has state centric thought and thus it can not deal with any threats outside state conflict (Takayuki Yamamura 2000). Central to critical theory is the need to cope with four crises, namely, regional crisis, energy crisis, food crisis, and environmental crisis.

All states in the system are involved in a global web of security interdependence and often security is associated with proximity. This is evidenced by the crisis in West Africa, Great Lakes Region conflict and conflict in the Horn of Africa. Besides conflict, environmental disasters occur in proximity sense: floods in Southern Africa, drought in East Africa and Sahel Region. Most states fear their neighbors more than distant powers.

Though classical complex theory was pre-occupied with military-political sectors it can be applied to modern conceptions where security complexes are concentrated within specific sectors and different types of complexes that occur in different sectors. However, this is not to deny the fact that the regional logic can integrate different types of actors interacting across the political, economic and societal sectors. This enables one

to keep the entire picture in a single frame and keep track of inevitable spillovers between sectors.

Insights for African security need also to be drawn from the North/south/core/periphery debate that treats issues of history, development, spread and structural dominance of capitalist world economy, relationship of exploitation, dependency between unequally developed states and struggle for resources and markets has not escaped a paradigm for understanding Africa's problems. For the African union there needs to be an embracing of strategies that take cognisance of various historical precepts that shape the international order in the contemporary world.

### **The Challenges**

African continent in comparison to other continents has been embroiled in a security dilemma. The internal security environment has become more complex. It is characterized by a variety of security challenges ranging from terrorism, cross border security threats, failed states and internal conflict, self interest- states have their own heads, armies and flags. Leadership failure has engulfed Africa; one party states, personal rule, emergence of coups and counter coups. Drought, corruption, mismanagement, ill-conceived policies, skills shortages, political risks, stringent regulations and bureaucratic obstacles are the critical problems faced by the newly emerging states.

The nature of the African state reflects the disintegration of structure, legitimate authority, law, and political order within the confines of the state. High rate of population growth aggravates the existing problems of economic underdevelopment and place pressure on national infrastructure. Internally, the states that emerged at independence have presented themselves as an imperial power over the indigenous entities and

communities in terms of region, nationally, ethnicity, religion and class domination. The past has its bearing on the present society as Mbeki noted, “You cannot find reconciliation between blacks and whites in a situation in which poverty and prosperity continue to be defined in racial terms” (Kuseni Dhlamani 2005:21)

Internationally, the consequences of global inequalities, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and emergence of new interventionist policy doctrines have negatively affected the African continent. Current global trends in development reveal that insecurity concerns are prevalent in Africa more than any other continent. Being poverty-stricken places a nation on dependent relationship with the developed world and newly emerging economies. External subjugation of African states is continuing by other powerful states in the third world itself and the west and other newly emerging economies and institutions like the IMF, MNCs, G8 and regionalization- the tendency by some states to manipulate regional organization to become hegemonic powers.

Yash Tandon (1999:9) espoused of ‘another war...an invisible war’ that Africa is facing. This relates to re-colonization of African states through control of economies by the West. This dangerous war is being waged against the people and their economies by the forces of globalization. Strategic and economic interest of global superpowers has highly spoken of particularly the role of USA in contemporary political global discourse (Mandaza and Todtensen 1994:89)

In the same light, Kwame Nkrumah’s (1963) conceptualization of neo-colonialism highlights some problems that Africa is facing in relation to the developed world. The contributions by Walter Rodney (1973) need not to escape one’s mind in trying to comprehend insecurity situations and underdevelopment of Africa. The

historical processes of slavery and colonialism are central in this regard. The centrality of the military has been well espoused by Buzan who noted that the military means to security is intractable given the anarchic nature of the international system and the continued expansion of human knowledge in technology which makes it easier to develop more weapons. He noted of the serious problems that bedevils the contemporary world noting the impossibility of disarmament and arms control, which requires an international political condition that cannot be created (1987:290-1).

It has emerged that since 1963 achieving continental security has remained illusory, African continent has continued featuring chaos, coups, conflicts-intra and interstate, economic decline, political turmoil, cultural and social decadence. The status of the continent has continued featuring a “Mixture of manmade disasters, from unscrupulous rulers to international economic policies, including American and European barriers, and unrelenting cycle of conflict” (Somini Sengupta 2004:2). The case of both natural and man made

“...include historical legacies of slave trade and colonialism and the nature of post-independent African state and the nature of political contest therein or lack of such context, external intervention in the internal affairs of African countries by political powers of various denominations and vintages, external interventions driven by brute economic motives and internal destabilization driven by motive of capturing the state and its coffers” (Ali Abdel Gadir Ali 2000:235).

Economically, security has been viewed as freedom from want, Africa’s traditional importance as a new supplier of raw materials has diminished competition from synthetic substitutes and suppliers in Asia, Latin American and former Soviet



Union. Between 1967/8 and 1986/7, Africa's share in world primary product exports declined by ½ from 8,3 % to 4,2%. The resulting government indebtedness and lack of economic growth have reduced Africa's significance as an export market. Poor economic performance, combined with political instability and deteriorating infrastructure have discouraged new private investment and lending, and even precipitated some de-investment (Callaghy 1991, Gibbon 1992). Strategic and business interest has waned, the development coalition for Africa that traditionally drew support from the voluntary aid community, the churches, universities and other socially committed and internationally focused groups has lost influence in many industrialized countries. Some African economies are inherently weak and cannot respond to AEC stimulus and other externally driven policies. Bach informs that regionalization process goes hand in hand with institutional strategies, which are political responses of the states to the globalization of economies (1999:12).

Politically, lack of a sustainable democratic tradition in African countries has hindered security. National leaders have consistently strove to protect existing boundaries irrespective of how artificially they might have been drawn ignoring that state boundaries can be sorted out in ways acceptable to all relevant parties. And that governmental function can be decentralized to autonomous local entities. Some leaders use their nationalistic ideals to assume hegemonic roles in their regions, and such expansionist nationalist policies threaten ideas of forming organizations for building effective continental security as it creates a framework for militarization which in turn exacerbates inter and intra state conflicts.

Claude Ake (2000) noted the centrality of democracy debate on Africa, questioning the feasibility of democracy in Africa. For Africa he identified the centrality of inclusion of all the people in sharing power and wealth. The key is to bring ordinary people at the centre and removing them from vulnerabilities that will expose them to the vagaries of oppression, exploitation and underdevelopment.

Socially, in Africa levels of poverty, endemic diseases and unemployment are continuing and rapidly worsening. The availability and quality of social services have been greatly reduced. Social conflicts often leading to ethnic or national hostilities are on the increase. Martin Lees tried to analyze the prospects for peace and security in the 20th Century noting the centrality of the role of the world economy in shaping the current peace and security conditions ([www.monitor.upeace.org/innerpg.cfm?id\\_article=322](http://www.monitor.upeace.org/innerpg.cfm?id_article=322)). Pertinent issues for peace and security pertain to demographic growth, environmental constraints and competition for resources, the impacts of climate change, the consequences of persistent inequities and deprivation, arms expenditure and proliferation and declining in international solidarity and cooperation. Lees raised important global policy issues that need to be explored. These pertain to defining threats to peace and security, strengthening solidarity and cooperation, the designing of policies to manage systematic change and noted the centrality of the United Nations in addressing peace and security challenges ([www.monitor.upeace.org/innerpg.cfm?id\\_article=322](http://www.monitor.upeace.org/innerpg.cfm?id_article=322)).

External manipulation and interference is at a highest level. Changing global regimes as characterized eras of slave trade, imperialism, world war, decolonization, bipolarity, and global interdependence have never presented Africa with any benefits

rather it enabled creation and reinforcement of institutions for the continued exploitation of the continent and its people. The need to redynamise the continental body is essential as it was continually serving the neo-colonial and reactionary bourgeois regimes in Africa. Redynamised and equipped with efficient means to serve the people of Africa (Elena M'buyinga 1982:181). Robert O'Neil, analyzing European contemporary security challenge provided insights to contemporary international problems that Africa cannot escape from such problems as, boundary disputes, weapons of mass destruction, human agonies, terrorism, crime and drugs. Informing also of the other principal security threat that lies in the weak, defective political structures and collapse of state authority (Booth K 1998).

Despite efforts to stimulate growth, supported by massive aid and technical assistance by both bilateral and multilateral agencies, to foster agricultural production and to initiate other developmental programs to bring about more fundamental changes in the economic structure inherited at independence, the continent remains the most economically, socially and culturally deprived of all the regions the world (Asante S.K. 1987:131). The question that needs to be raised is “who owns global finance?” “Who conducts the global economic policy?”

The African insecurity situation is treated as if its roots lay no more than a few years in the past rather than decades or centuries. Lessons learnt from history of Africa presents images founded on slavery, colonialism, and racism. Recent look on Africa reveals that end of colonialism and systems of oppression like apartheid did not end problems bedeviling African societies to date. Population has increased, cold war politics have ended, global money transfers, instant communication and rapid air travel have

brought people and countries closer together. African capitals are in touch with other world capitals by phone, computer technology and yet put the rural areas far more isolated.

Internal vulnerability of African states is responsible for high level of conflict in many parts of the continent. Internal issues helped domestic conflict mutate into interstate conflicts by providing the opportunity for neighboring states to intervene in internal conflict. It is apparent that the ideologies of unplanned and uncontrolled market forces, foreign dictated and rushed privatizations as well as economic dependence on the west have all driven Africa to this catastrophic situation.

Africa lacks ideology. Mahoso clearly enunciated the idea,

*“Ideology refers to forms of language and expression in which men and women, communities and nations make and live their own history as conscious actors. Ideology is a system of values which serve four basic functions: it enables every society to teach the young the difference between what is good, desirable, beautiful and praiseworthy on the one hand and what is bad, evil, ugly and undesirable on the other hand...ideology enables the same society to teach its young ones the difference between what exists and what does not exist.... ideology enables the society to teach the young the difference between what is possible and what is impossible...sifting mechanism for the appropriate language which is adequate [in ensuring cultural imperialism]... Institutions created serve other people’s interest independent of Africa’s needs and priorities [examples are] African commission on Human and People’s*

*Rights, the United Nations Commission for Africa, the African Development Forum and the African Development Bank [often serve] as foreign intervention agencies rather than African institutions they are supposed to be...adopted and copied words should be the following: multi-party democracy; transition to democracy, transparency; accountability, participatory democracy; stakeholders; governance; ethnic cleansing, humanitarian intervention; global village; and globalization...wiped away [are concepts of] imperialism; solidarity; crimes of apartheid, liberation struggle; frontline states; Pan-Africanism; and Afro-Asian solidarity. In colonial and neocolonial situations many Africans were made to believe that African society was congenitally and permanently fragmented as tribal groups who were incapable of unity” (2005:12)*

Problems of definition often arise. What is Africa? Africa can be defined in a narrow sense to refer to territorial, geographical and landscape outlining the land, to include the island and water mass, to include the people that live and survive on it. From a Pan-Africanist point of view, it includes the land, water mass, the people, not only blacks, but whites Arabs etc, and rather it is multi-racial. Some countries with black Arab population and some with whites of European origin. Thus, defining Africa in terms of black identity presents a misnomer and error that can/may generate conflicts. Africa is simply the continent as represented by today’s map-makers: that essential triangle, bounded on its northern flat by the Mediterranean and the Red Seas, and on its two other sides by the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, together with its outlying islands. Just as with any other continent, it is subject to its own historical-geographical tensions, has its own

internal networking and external linkages with other continents (especially, Europe, Asia and the New World) — true with different traffic vectors, the heteroclitite traffic vector, with differing geographies of derivation, but with New World terminus, sustained for over four centuries, which, composed with flows from Europe and Asia, facilitated the construction of the New World. (Chu S.P. Okongwu 1998)

A critique of the African Union requires caution. The tool for analysis can never be agreed upon. It must be understood that the process of integrating communities is impeached upon by a number of factors. In politics it is not guaranteed that the African Union will succeed in everything. There is a tendency to assume that in Africa we are left behind and we cannot solve our own problems. EU has the same problems. It should be borne in mind that we should not expect the unachievable yardstick for measurement. A lot of problems exist in Africa, but there are good things peculiar to Africa. To try and evaluate the AU to date is premature and tantamount to retrogression/regression though raising pertinent issues that the founding fathers and the architects need to take into consideration. According to Horace Campbell the presentation of human rights, the rule of law as a panacea for all of Africa's ills requires one to be reminded that the sickness and the medicine on offer is historically and socially determined (in Nzongola Ntalaja and Lee F.C. 1998:201), the objective conditions of oppression and the struggles for democracy have led to new forms of resistance to unjust governments at all levels of political economy. The current model of ownership and control of productive resources cannot be the basis for democracy in Africa. Achievement of democracy for Africa requires the dismantling of coercive structures, which were implanted to alienate the labour power of Africans. Africans will not experience peace unless fundamental changes

occur in the international system with respect to demilitarization and disarmament (Ibid 203).

African Union arose out of the weakness caused by African Unity. The idea of African unity and the need for an institution for Africa's development can be traced back to the "TNT Conference" (named after Tubman of Liberia, Nkrumah of Ghana, Toure of Guinea) held in Seniquelle, Liberia 1960 with the realization that without unity Africa will not develop. According to George Authur Blair, he who controls the present, controls the future. He who controls the future controls the present. The concept of pan-Africanism has to expand beyond its original base to a concept of world union of all African people, the African in Africa, the African in the Caribbean, the African in South America, the African in the Pacific Islands- the Africans throughout the World. OAU registered limited success partly because of weaknesses that were inherent in the charter, such as the lack of enforcement procedures of OAU resolutions, in the case of financial obligations some member-states have gone on for some years without paying their dues; this jeopardizes the smooth running of the organization. The Constitutive Act of the AU provides for sanctions against members who do not comply with resolutions and other provisions of the Act and allow intervention in internal affairs of member states, observance of democracy, good governance, human rights and gender issues. Economic recovery has been brought into the fore, MARP- Millennium Africa's Recovery Plan and OMEGA calls for investment in health, infrastructure, education and agriculture.

*"Africa has the resources to rise above its current challenges, and must go further to stress that with a resurgent imperialism, there is an urgent need to bring back the national project through the triadic notions of Africa-*

*Nations, pan Africanism, and African Renaissance. These they see as necessary both as narratives for development and as counter strategies for the current drive towards hegemony and re-colonization” (Aurhur-Jim Patsadza 2005:16).*

Information has been identified as a key attribute to achieving democracy, good governance, development and security. Information is power but as Abate noted for Africa it does not generate this information (Dejen Abate 1996)

### **Conclusion**

The paper has attempted to comprehensively locate the security dilemma which the African Union has to grapple with as it matures into a fully fledged institution to transform the lives of the African peoples from the backdrop of centuries of slavery and colonialization. The problems for Africa as the paper has exposed cannot be viewed in isolation with each other neither can they be solved independent of each other. There is need to move further and use the complex security paradigm as a reference point in identifying the problems and solving them.



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