

for
better or
worse?

COURTING AFRICA



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Africa in Transition

Facing the Challenges of Globalization

On March 6, 1957 Ghana became the first sub-Saharan country to achieve independence from European colonial rule. Over the next 23 years, most of the other sub-Saharan colonies followed suit. Expectations on the continent and around the world were high, as leaders hoped that sub-Saharan African states would “take off” both politically and economically to become viable, independent actors in the world community. However, most independent African states struggled almost immediately under the weight of protracted political and economic crises.

Africa’s “first wave” of democratization quickly morphed into a wave of autocracy as African militaries seized power in the mid-1960s, and multiparty systems gave way to authoritarian, one-party regimes. Economic stagnation had set in by the early 1980s, and African states became increasingly dependent on international development assistance, thereby incurring enormous debts. Then, after the end of the Cold War, Western powers began to make their aid to Africa conditional on the pursuit of good governance and democratization. In the early 1990s, Africa entered a “second wave” of democratization as autocratic regimes gave way to new, more democratic constitutions and multiparty systems.

Given Africa’s crisis-prone transition from colonialism to independence and the many challenges its states have faced, it seems reasonable to ask what Africa has achieved in the 50 years since the start of the independence movement. Have African states moved from the margins of the international community to the center? Do they now have a stronger voice in the discourse on democracy and globalization, or are they as marginal as they were at the time of independence? Africa undoubtedly faces many challenges today, and it must continue to struggle not to lose ground in this age of globalization. Certainly Africa is not yet in a position to completely overcome these challenges—at least in the short run. However, if Africa’s leaders want to move the continent forward and create a new position within the global community, they must make a concerted effort to begin addressing these challenges now.

The Legacy of Colonialism

Even though the period of colonial rule was a relatively brief one in Africa, the European powers profoundly reordered African political space, modes of economic production, and social hierarchies and cleavages. The modality of colonial rule varied from one colonial power to the next, but the end result was always domination, exploitation, and organized repression. Despite this, World War II coincided with the emergence of African demands for political independence.

With the onset of the independence era, colonial regimes in Africa were replaced by independent, African-led regimes that were more or less carbon copies of their colonizers’ political systems. At a fundamental level, the post-colonial African state looked like a top-heavy administrative state. African leaders hoped that this model would lead to self-sustained economic development—a hope that unfor-

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unately was never realized. European powers relinquished political control on their former African possessions, but not their economic interests and influence. The formal trappings of colonialism were replaced by a situation of neo-colonialism, in which Africa remained heavily dependent on foreign private investment and bilateral and multilateral development assistance. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund set the development agenda for Africa starting in the 1960s, rather than allowing African countries to decide individually or collectively how to develop their own economies and societies. Bilateral donors such as Britain and France benefited from their relationships with former colonies and Africa's continued dependence on European monetary assistance and capital investment. For example, the former colonial powers, as well as the rest of the Western world, encouraged the export of primary products from Africa so they could be processed in European factories. Such economic relationships, rather than encouraging economic self-sufficiency and development, generated situations of one-sided economic dependence and an over reliance on Western support.

Drift Toward Autocracy

Most African countries were at least nominally democratic at independence, but by 1990, 60 percent of Africa's sovereign states had experienced military rule. Among the remaining civilian regimes, only seven countries had competitive party systems: Botswana, Gambia, Mauritius, Senegal, Swaziland, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. Dictatorships generally came in two forms: military rule and one-party rule. African autocrats claimed that instead of democracy, African states needed these development dictatorships in order to promote economic growth.

In addition to authoritarianism, various ideologies came to be seen as panaceas that could help states realize their development objectives. Some African states took on conservative ideological positions and practiced a form of African capitalism that promoted free markets with a major economic leadership role for the state. In most cases, this strategy failed and economies stagnated. On the other hand, some states, including Tanzania and Zambia, adopted what came to be known as African populism or African socialism, while still others adopted

various forms of Afro-Marxism. African socialism and Afro-Marxism were alike in that they were radical, anti-imperialist ideologies, but they differed in that populist socialism was highly nationalistic. In contrast, Afro-Marxism embraced the Marxian methodology and was international, not nationalistic, in its orientation. Like Afro-capitalism, these two approaches advocated various forms of state planning to achieve economic growth. Ideology and planning came to be seen as magical potions that would lead to self-sustained development. But ideology also tended to mask very serious economic weaknesses and enabled leaders to pursue ill-conceived development strategies without much accountability to the general population or even to the providers of development assistance.

The post-independence period in Africa also coincided with the beginning of the Cold War, in which the United States and the Soviet Union both sought to acquire supportive clients in Africa by providing military and economic assistance in exchange for international political support. These clients adopted different approaches to development based on their own perceptions of the benefits of close association with one superpower or the other. In a few cases, patron states could exert some leverage over the political decisions of their clients because they provided them with



Opposite: Soldiers celebrate the 50th anniversary of Ghana's independence. Above: Eritrean soldiers commemorate the anniversary of the liberation of the city of Massawa from Soviet Union-backed Ethiopia in 1990.

development and military assistance.

For example, upon displacing the United States as Ethiopia's superpower patron, the Soviets wanted Ethiopia's Marxist-Leninist leaders to create a vanguard party to lead the revolution. But this occurred only gradually, and no sooner had the Worker's Party of Ethiopia been concretely established, it was quickly dissolved. In addition, although countries like Kenya and Zambia strongly identified with Western patrons, they often played these patron countries

to demonstrated progress in these three areas.

In addition, the end of the Cold War resulted in different relationships between African and non-African donor countries and an abandonment of ideological rhetoric. African regimes generally committed themselves to turning the process of globalization to their advantage rather than perceiving themselves as its victims. They realized that in order to become effective players on the global stage, they were going to have to establish an active presence in organi-

“AFRICAN REGIMES GENERALLY COMMITTEED THEMSELVES TO TURNING THE PROCESS OF GLOBALIZATION TO THEIR ADVANTAGE.”

off of one another when it came to pursuing development assistance. Thus, whether the form was direct dictatorship or autocracy veiled in attractive slogans of ideology, the continent witnessed a consistent shift toward authoritarianism in the 40 years following independence.

The Development of Underdevelopment

Instead of championing development, African autocratic states tended to preside over the development of underdevelopment. These countries were constrained in several ways. First, worldwide economic crisis forced donors to reconsider the levels of aid they were providing to African countries and how it was being used. Second, the hardship that African countries underwent during this economic crisis led to popular discontent in one country after another. Instead of responding positively to this unrest, African states tended to isolate themselves from any meaningful channels of popular expression. This later gave rise to the resurgence of civil society, which led to the onset of a second wave of democratization beginning in the early 1990s. The trend at the time seemed to be away from authoritarian rule and toward free market capitalism and liberal democracy.

Yet this trend must be placed in a proper context. By the late 1980s, the ideological competition between the United States and the Soviet Union was coming to an end. The Soviets drastically reduced their economic assistance to African clients and totally eliminated their military aid. At the same time, the United States and its Western allies ended their military support of African parties, which had often been accompanied by a blind eye toward corruption and economic mismanagement. Western donors now emphasized “good governance,” free-market capitalism, democratization, and economic assistance to African states, and aid became linked

zations such as the World Trade Organization and the United Nations. Progress has been made in this direction, but there remains an ongoing debate in Africa over the merits of the globalization process.

Some argue that the negative aspects of globalization far outweigh the positives. Protest groups have emerged to publicize the unfair advantage that rich countries have over poor ones in the WTO when it comes to setting trade rules and regulations. The general argument made by these globalization opponents is that globalization creates more losers than winners. Thus, the broad challenge that African countries face is to produce more winners than losers. This challenge is complex and formidable, but it must be faced by African peoples if their countries are to progress.

I suggest that within this globalization challenge, Africa presently faces four specific politico-economic challenges: human security and development, the debt crisis and trade issues, domestic and regional conflicts, and democracy and human rights.

Human Security and Development

At a very fundamental level, the challenge facing the nations of Africa can be subsumed under the rubric of human security. There is ample evidence that political instability can easily become transnationalized—threatening national, regional, and even international security. This is partly due to the fact that when the Cold War competition of the superpowers came to a close in Africa, the arms that were provided by the superpowers remained in use. In fact, the number of weapons on the continent expanded, which occurred when private arms traders began to deal with African customers directly. Many of these customers used their access to mineral resources such as diamonds, timber, and coltan to finance their arms purchases. Presently, regions such as

AFRICA IN TRANSITION: FACING THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBALIZATION

the Horn of Africa and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo are saturated with small arms and marked by ongoing civil conflicts.

As in the past, African states are attempting to mobilize and reverse the tide of human insecurity. Various mechanisms designed to achieve this end are now either in place or on the drawing board (e.g. the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development). Recent innovations such as these make clear the intention of African states to do more to solve their own problems. But it remains to be seen whether Africa can solve its human security problems alone. Some observers insist that, given the global dimensions of the dilemma, other actors must become committed to its resolution.

Currently, all the major world powers are more motivated by their own perceived national interests than by a desire to alleviate African insecurity. For example, in the wake of the 1998 US embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, the United States came to see an improvement in African countries' ability to fight international terrorism as in its own national interest. This led to US plans to create a new strategic military command specifically centered on Africa. With the aid of the United States, African countries could measurably improve their ability to solve problems of peace and security on their own. To be sure, this benefits the African countries involved, but the motivation of the United States has more to do with its own interests.

The Debt Crisis and Trade Issues

Another important challenge lies in the fact that African countries must devote a significant portion of their annual GDP to debt servicing and repayment, which reduces the funds available for tackling the social problems of communicable diseases, poverty, and underdevelopment. Realizing the need to reduce these debt burdens, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund launched the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative in 1996 to help these countries address their debt crises. The initiative frees up resources that African countries can use to tackle some of their most pressing problems in public health and social and economic development. It targeted 33 African countries for debt relief. So far, 19 have received assistance, and another 7 are receiving interim support. However, critics say that these measures are too late and insufficient, and that bolder steps must be taken.

The United States in particular has sought to help Africa integrate itself into the world economy. A significant initiative of both the Clinton and Bush administrations has been the African Growth and Opportunity Act, which encouraged exports and lowered trade barriers for 33 African countries. As a result, two-way trade increased 37 percent

between 2004 and 2005 to a total of US\$60 billion, and US imports from sub-Saharan Africa increased 44 percent, although this was largely due to oil imports. Unfortunately, trade in other goods declined. Moreover, cheap products and subsidized goods from abroad are displacing African traders in their own countries. Under such circumstances, weak African economies often become weaker and cannot compete with cheaper foreign imports. African countries must receive more debt relief and gain more favorable terms of trade in the international marketplace, but they must also manage their resources more wisely so as to advance their developmental objectives.

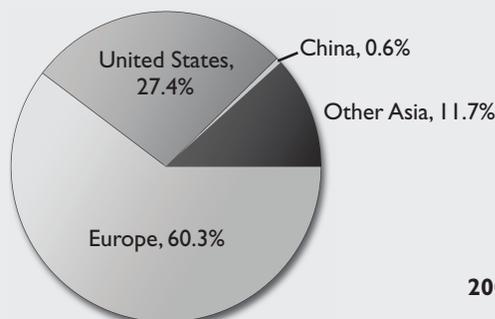
Domestic and Regional Conflict

The difficulties of achieving sustainable economic development are compounded by the presence of persistent conflicts in the region. The past decade has witnessed increasing incidents of intense conflict on the African continent. The 1990s witnessed a violent civil war in Sierra Leone involving rebel groups opposed to a democratically elected government. It also saw a historically peaceful Ivory Coast become embroiled in military coups and its own civil war.

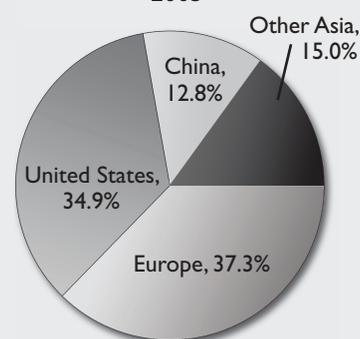
THE BALANCE OF TRADE

Destination Shares of Sub-Saharan African Exports

1990



2005



The last decade has seen an increase in the amount of sub-Saharan trade with both China and the US. In 2005 alone, two-way trade between the US and sub-Saharan Africa totaled US\$60 billion.

IMF Regional Economic Outlook 2007

In spite of UN peacekeeping efforts in Sierra Leone and French efforts in the Ivory Coast, peace remains tenuous in both countries.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the bankrupt government of Laurent Kabila enlisted the aid of the neighboring states of Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe in an effort to resist the attempts of numerous opposition groups—aided and abetted by forces from Uganda, Burundi, and Rwanda—to overthrow his government. The United Nations eventually brokered a ceasefire and peace talks and dispatched a peacekeeping force to the eastern region of the country. A Transitional Constitution went into effect in April 2003, and national elections were eventually held in October 2006.

past several years, the African Union has had between 3,000 and 7,000 peacekeepers in Darfur, but this small military presence has not been able to do much more than monitor the situation. In addition, the broader international community has attempted to apply various forms of pressure, but to no effect.

In the eastern Horn of Africa, the problem since the summer of 1998 has been a devastating border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. What was unusual and ominous about this conflict was that it was Africa's first ever high-tech war. It is estimated that at the height of this conflict, which lasted for approximately one year, Ethiopia was spending about US\$1 million per day on the war effort, for a total cost between US\$2.9 and US\$3.1 billion. The Organization of African

Unity brokered a peace in 2000, and the United Nations established the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, a peacekeeping mission that has been occupying a buffer zone between the two countries. Even though both sides had agreed to accept the commission's findings as binding, Ethiopia has since refused to do so, and a stalemate has developed over the final demarcation of the border zone.

The United Nations and the African Union, along with bilateral aid agencies, spend a good deal of time trying to figure out how to keep the peace in Africa. But very little time has yet been devoted to building peace. This is the challenge for the future: to create social and economic conditions that steer countries away from both internal and regional wars.

Democracy and Human Rights

In the foreseeable future, the prospects for further democratization of African countries are mixed. Over the past 15 years, there has been a mush-

rooming of at least nominally democratic multi-party systems and elections. However, there have also been places where democratic reversals have occurred or where incumbent elites have perverted the democratic process. For example, in 2000, flawed elections in the Ivory Coast and Zimbabwe led directly to protracted civil strife. In Kenya, although the National Rainbow Coalition was able to loosen the Kenya African National Union's grip on the reins of government in 2002, it has been unable to agree on a new constitution that would give more authority to parliament.



An election official in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, tallies votes during the October 2006 presidential elections. The events leading up to the election were complicated and required the help of the United Nations.

In Sudan, a civil war pitting the Arab-Muslim North against the largely Christian and Animist South finally ended in January 2005. The United Nations did not directly intervene, but there was a successful effort beginning in 2002 on the part of the Intergovernmental Agency for Development to broker a peace. However, the opposition Sudan People's Liberation Army was able to hold its own and forced a mutually harmful stalemate. Even as the civil war in the southern Sudan was being concluded, another erupted in Darfur that has continued until now. For the

Elections in Ghana in December 2000 and Mauritius in July 2005 resulted in peaceful power transfers. In other countries such as Senegal, Lesotho, and Zambia, there were relatively peaceful multiparty elections between 2005 and 2007, but incumbent parties maintained their grip on executive authority. In contrast, in Ethiopia's 2005 elections, a peaceful and open political campaign was followed by state-sponsored violence and a crackdown on the opposition.

It is hard to say for sure that Africa will not return to a dominant pattern of autocracy. However, the positive effects of certain globalization processes suggest that Africa's future may lie in the direction of greater democracy. The

various infrastructure projects such as the TanZam railway, but this support was for the most part superficial and not based upon any sort of long-term commitment to African stability or liberalization.

With the end of the Cold War and China's new efforts to become a major player in the global market, its policies toward Africa have shifted. China is not interested in African democratization and human rights, and instead it is focusing on gaining access to the continent's markets and minerals, including petroleum. This has significant implications for the prospect of deepening democracy on the continent. China's claim to respect the sovereignty of African states leaves the

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growth in the links between domestic civil society groups in Africa and similar groups throughout the world, as well as advances in information technology and the growing emphasis on the need for a free press in Africa, are creating environments in which democracy and human rights can begin to take root.

New Superpower Dynamics

Despite the necessity for African states to assume the principal responsibility for addressing problems on the continent, other international actors still have significant roles to play in helping Africa cope with and ultimately overcome these challenges. In the immediate aftermath of the independence era, two of the three major European colonizers, Belgium and Great Britain, stopped intervening in Africa altogether, except in the form of development assistance and private business operations. This left France as the only European power to assume a military interventionist role. But by the end of the Cold War, France had also lowered its physical presence on the continent, following the example of Great Britain and the United States, by pursuing policies that encouraged economic liberalization and the cultivation of environments conducive to democratization.

Now it is China that poses the greatest threat to Africa's ability to promote democracy and human rights. For the first 40 years following African independence, China had maintained a fairly low profile. Ian Taylor has argued that until 1989, China had largely looked upon Africa as “immaterial,” and treated the continent with “benign neglect.” Granted, it had attempted to create goodwill by supporting

way open for governments to engage in gross crimes against humanity in places like Sudan and Zimbabwe. Western states, such as Great Britain and the United States, see China's involvement in Africa as particularly threatening to concrete democratic progress, which they believe to be conducive to economic development and poverty alleviation.

Africa's New Global Position

Over the past 50 years, a great deal has changed in Africa. African countries are represented in international organizations such as the United Nations and are beginning to develop increasingly effective regional and subregional political and economic organizations. However, they have yet to secure positions equal to those of the more developed countries of the world. African countries are increasingly valued for their strategic natural resources and potentially lucrative goods markets.

At a very fundamental level, the primary challenge that African countries confront is to become effective players in the globalization game. In other words, they first must halt the potential drift toward further marginalization and begin to advance the cause of Africa relative to other regions of the world. There is no doubt that Africa and its peoples have already benefited from advances in communication, medicine, and transportation, but this has not been sufficient to eliminate the scourges of poverty, underdevelopment, and inequality. If Africa wants to accomplish these long-term goals, its leaders, in conjunction with other major world players, must begin to develop effective strategies and policies for addressing these major challenges. ■